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GARDENS ILLUSTRATED

Modern style

Discover the contemporary English garden

Hot pots

Elegant ideas for containers

PLUS

How to make a meadow

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Welcome

JOHN CAMPBELL

Late spring arrives with its promise of brighter evenings, and the dance of bringing the cushions for the garden furniture out and in and out again begins in earnest. This is the season we pray to the gardening gods not to send a late frost, and to make the RHS Chelsea Flower Show a really good one this year. And having done countless interviews and masses of research for our preview, here at *Gardens Illustrated* we can confirm the horticultural deities have indeed been kind, because the 2024 show is shaping up to be a bumper event. Find out all about the show gardens, the Great Pavilion, the people behind the scenes and efforts to make the show more sustainable in our special Chelsea section this issue (page 85), and make sure you keep up with our ongoing coverage in the run up to and during the show on our website and social channels. Sign up to our Chelsea newsletter now and you'll receive the breaking news from the showground every day of show week, straight to your inbox.

Also this issue, we are looking at exquisite examples of the contemporary country garden, with the brand new English-style garden at Caisson House near Bath (page 34) and the wonderful, wider wildflower meadow and lake in the garden of Peter Clay, of online garden company Crocus, on the Welsh Borders (page 66). There's a tiny city courtyard dripping with wisteria, whose owner has gone up and up with his planting to take advantage of every inch of space (page 54); and a woodland-style garden with an interesting new dry meadow planting to enjoy (page 76).

Plus, we have plants galore with ten top flowers to fill that May-time gap (page 18), a profile of foxtail lilies (page 46) and designer Jo Thompson's inspired planting ideas for beautiful late-spring pots and containers (page 60).

Stephanie Mahon

STEPHANIE MAHON, EDITOR

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ANDREW MAYBURY

Discover ten great plants to fill the May gap, including this gorgeous *Meconopsis* 'Lingholm', page 18.

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About Farmer Gracy

Have you ever grown the biggest and best Dutch bulbs? Farmer Gracy is the place you'll find them, and you'll be blown away by the flower quality and longevity of the blooms.

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Starting with some fantastic bulbs to plant now for summer, followed by a brand new autumn range available to preorder from next month.

Our favourites

The ultimate goal is to create a garden which is show-stopping all year round, or for as much of the year as possible. It's entirely achievable, given time and the addition of new plants each spring and autumn in preparation for the seasons ahead. Now's a good time to make a start on what will be an ongoing project which is both exciting and rewarding. Gardens take time to establish and each year there will be something which can be changed, moved or added to adapt and improve its appearance – watching your garden evolve as it matures is part of what makes horticulture so satisfying!

When to order plants for a year-round display

Plants and bulbs are available seasonally according to their growth cycles, which dictate harvest and planting times. This means that achieving year-round plant perfection can't be done all in one mass planting project, you will need to add to your planting scheme in spring and autumn each year to work towards a flowering season which lasts seamlessly from early spring right through to late autumn. For example, spring-flowering bulbs, like tulips and alliums, are available to buy through summer and

Saponaria ocymoides
starting at **£7.90** for 5 bulbs

Echinops 'Veitch's Blue'
starting at **£5.95** for 1 root

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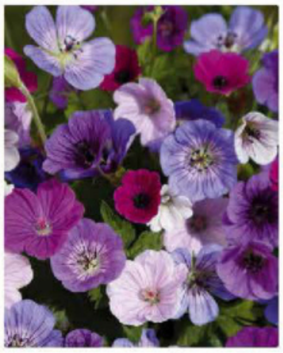

Geranium 'Breeders Mix'
starting at **£11.85** for 3 roots

Dahlia 'Café au Lait Rosé'
starting at **£5.25** for 1 tuber

autumn, and must be planted during autumn. Summer and autumn-flowering plants are available to buy during winter and spring in time for spring planting.

Invest in top quality bulbs and plants

The success of your planting scheme also depends on the quality of the plants you add to it. Investing in top quality bulbs and plants makes a big difference in terms of performance – large bulbs and established bare root are loaded with vigour and produce bigger, more impressive plants and flowers and will achieve the results you're aiming for sooner than smaller or cheaper options.

If you've been inspired by some of the show gardens at the RHS Chelsea Flower Show, you may have an idea in mind of how you would like to adapt your garden. The plants used for Chelsea show gardens naturally flower around May, including tulips, alliums, ornamental grasses, irises, Geum, Aquilegia and peonies. Some of these varieties are planted in autumn and others are available for spring planting.

Reader offer

To help put your planting ideas into motion, we're offering Gardens Illustrated readers a £10 discount on orders over £50 until 20th May 2024. Being on the cusp of the new season, you can use this discount to order from our summer range now, and from our autumn range next month! Enter code **GICFS24** at checkout.*

Do you need planting advice? No problem! We want you to get the best out of your bulbs. If you're new to gardening, or have decided to try a variety that's new to you, get in touch with our customer care team and our qualified horticulturists will be happy to advise.

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starting at **£12.90** for 1 bulb

*Offer ends 20th May 2024. Despatch May. Discount cannot be used in conjunction with any other discount code. Max 1 use per customer.

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SABRINA ROTHE

Discover Antoine Vandewoude's fabulously romantic courtyard garden, page 54.

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Caisson House garden by Jason Ingram (page 34)

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Design: Harry Holding

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Jo McKerr
Jo makes the case for putting nature first, page 146. *“It was fascinating to explore the many novel ways gardeners are challenging themselves to go beyond tokenistic wildlife gardens.”*

Matthew Wilson
Matthew chooses the best *Eremurus*, page 46. *“I fell in love with these beautiful plants almost 25 years ago. They may not last long in flower but every moment is worth savouring.”*

Rosanna Morris
Rosanna illustrates our new column, page 146. *“I absolutely love reading these articles, working on these illustrations and generally getting to make work for* Gardens Illustrated.*”*

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ANDREW MONTGOMERY

ANDREW MONTGOMERY

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Anna was *The Independent*’s gardening correspondent for 30 years and is the author of the bestselling book *The Tulip*. In 2000 the RHS awarded her the Veitch Memorial Medal. She lives and gardens in Dorset.

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Dan is one of the UK’s best-known garden designers. Among his many award-winning gardens is the Tokachi Millennium Forest in Japan. He was awarded an OBE in the 2022 New Year Honours for services to horticulture.

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Sarah is one of the UK’s most sought-after garden designers. She won Gold at Chelsea in 2012, 2018 and 2023, and was GMG Garden Columnist of the Year in 2016 for her design series in *Gardens Illustrated*.

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NEWS COMPILED BY **MOLLY BLAIR**

LOUISE KEAR, ED OVENDEN / TOBY'S GARDEN FESTIVAL

OUT & ABOUT

FESTIVAL FEELING

Toby's Garden Festival is celebrating its tenth anniversary this year with two days of inspirational events planned in the grounds of Powderham Castle near Exeter. Visitors can expect a packed programme of gardening talks and demonstrations as well as food and drink tastings, workshops, and live music. Alongside Toby Buckland, Rachel de Thame and Sue Kent will be headlining the festival with talks and book signings. More than 200 exhibitors will be attending the show, including award-winning nurseries selling everything from British-grown trees, wildflowers and aquatic plants to roses and shrubs. In the Artisan Barn, attendees can shop from local craftspeople, including ceramics, textiles and glassware producers, watch heritage craft demonstrations and take part in free flower-crown making workshops. To mark the anniversary, Toby is collaborating with Paul Jupp from Meadow in my Garden to launch The Pocket Meadow Project, giving visitors free wildlife-friendly seed packets with enough kernels to create a mini meadow. The festival runs from 3-4 May; tickets start at £13.50 and can be booked at **tobygardenfest.co.uk**

ANDREIA SALVADOR

Talking point

CAN GARDENERS MAKE FRIENDS WITH SLUGS AND SNAILS?

Slugs and snails have historically been maligned as the gardener's arch nemeses – munching seedlings, decimating crops and ruining flowers. But is this reputation wholly deserved? The RHS and The Wildlife Trusts don't think so, and have recently launched the campaign Making Friends with Molluscs in an attempt to give slugs and snails a bit of a break from the hate. But it is likely to take some time for gardeners to adjust to the idea that they need to live in harmony with molluscs. In a recent poll by *Gardens Illustrated*, between 68 and 78 per cent of respondents still saw them as garden pests.

Jon Ablett (above) is senior curator of molluscs at the Natural History Museum and thinks they're misunderstood. "Molluscs are an amazingly diverse group of animals," he says. "They're found all over the world and in almost every habitat. While gardeners may think that slugs and snails exist purely to eat their plants, they should remember that they are part of our complex ecological community, providing food for birds, insects, amphibians and small mammals as well as helping to process the soil and increase the cycling of nutrients. Not all species of slug and snail feed on living vegetation, with some preferentially eating decaying plant and animal matter and fungi or even other slug and snail species."

No matter how much destruction they may cause to your hostas, slugs and snails are a vital part of our ecosystems and, perhaps they deserve some respect.

To read more about living with molluscs, scan the QR code left or head to **gardensillustrated.com/molluscs**

EEYANDUF

SHOPPING

Pretty colours in the air

East London Parasol Company has launched a set of new designs for 2024 in a range of colours and patterns. Botanical gardens, particularly the Waterlily House at Kew, were the inspiration for the new collection, which showcases bold colour combinations including shades of maroon, tawny, raspberry and violet alongside marigold, orange, green and primrose yellow. The new sunshades are perfect for relaxing in style in the garden this summer. Prices start at £399 and parasols can be purchased at ***eastlondonparasols.com***

OPERATIC ROSES

To coincide with the Glyndebourne Festival 2024, the garden team has launched a collection of three roses celebrating opera and horticulture. Bred by Harkness Roses, the plants will be available from Glyndebourne's online shop and cost £25 each. The collection consists of *Rosa* Glyndebourne (= 'Harpulse'), an elegant shrub rose with soft, creamy-coloured flowers; *Rosa* 'Mildmay', which has peachy flowers and was first introduced during last year's festival; and *Rosa* 'Lady Mary', an upright shrub which has orange to pink flowers and a citrus scent. For more information and to purchase, visit **glyndebourneshop.com**

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Rowena Moore – East Sussex

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PAUL DEBOIS

OUT & ABOUT

SECRET GARDENS

London Open Gardens returns this June, celebrating 25 years of opening hidden green spaces in the capital to the public. This year, 116 gardens will welcome visitors on 8-9 June, across 12 London boroughs. From permaculture gardens to allotments and from squares to streets, there will a plethora of places to explore over the weekend. Among those opening their gates are the Barbican Wildlife Garden, Inner Temple Garden (above) and The Charterhouse (below). Weekend tickets cost £22 from **londongardenstrust.org**

CLAIRE DAVIES

THOMPSON & MORGAN

VEGETABLE PLOT

Little gems

Thompson & Morgan has introduced new fruit and vegetables to its range this season, with many of the new varieties well suited to growing in pots. Aubergine 'Baby Black Jack' (£9.99 for a 9cm pot) is a micro aubergine that grows to just 30-35cm tall and produces clusters of golfball-sized fruits on spineless plants. Other new additions include Cucumber 'Quick Snack' and Sweet Pepper 'Halloween Orange'. ***thompson-morgan.com***

WHAT TO DO IN... *MAY*

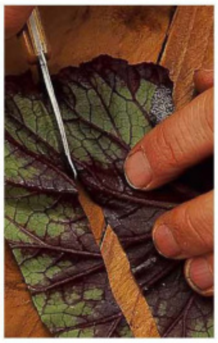
3-17

Understanding disability in garden design This blended online course provides garden designers with the skills to create therapeutic green spaces for disability, recovery and rehabilitation. 3-17 May. £120. Tel 0118 988 5688, **thrive.org.uk**

ETSUKO ARAKAWA

11

Wildlife Gardening for Families Explore the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh and discover what makes a garden more wildlife friendly. Saturday 11 May, 2-3.30pm. £35. Royal Botanic Garden, Edinburgh EH3 5NZ. Tel 0131 248 2909, **rbge.org.uk**



TIM SANDALL

23

Leaf Cutting Workshop Learn how to grow new plants from whole or partial leaf cuttings from a range of houseplants. 23 May, 10am-12pm or 1-3pm. £55.85. RHS Garden Bridgewater, Worsley, Salford, Greater Manchester M28 2LJ. **rhs.org.uk**

SHOPPING

Dressed for spring

Homeware brand By Hope has launched a collection of spring table linens perfect for brightening up any indoor or outdoor dining set-up. The Spring Posy Collection includes napkins (£18) and tablecloths (£125) featuring scattered spring flower motifs of violas and lily of the valley (pictured). Also new to the range this year is a collaboration between By Hope and Marla & Primrose, who have joined forces to create the Wild Bloom limited edition collection of napkins (£18) and tablecloths (£140) featuring hand-painted blooms. For more information and to purchase visit **byhope.co.uk**

OLLIEDAHMEN_DOP

DESIGN

Pond life

Thanks to National Lottery Heritage funding, Birmingham Botanical Gardens has built a new state-of-the-art pond for its ornamental fish, and reimagined their former home in the Tropical House. The koi carp have been moved to a heated, glass-sided, outdoor pool where visitors can observe them in their underwater habitat more easily. Once the fish were relocated from the glasshouse, the team began work to restore the space to its original purpose as a lily house. Grown from seed donated by Cambridge University Botanic Garden, the reintroduced giant waterlilies, *Victoria cruziana*, may grow up to two metres in diameter and are expected to bloom this summer. **birminghambotanicalgardens.org.uk**

3 FOR THE GARDEN…

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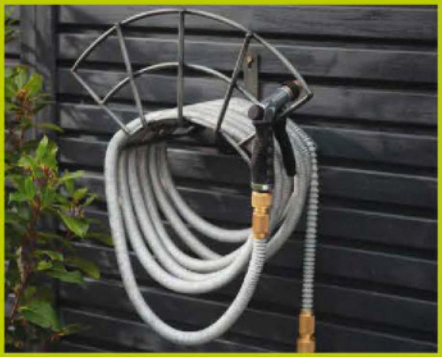

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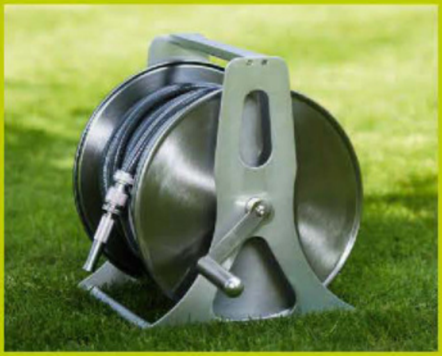

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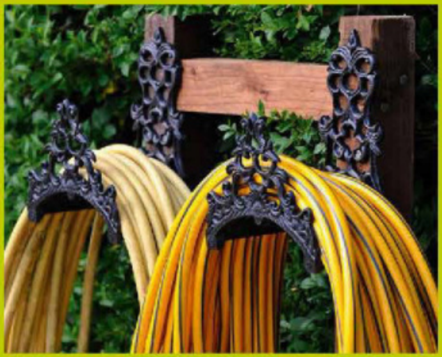

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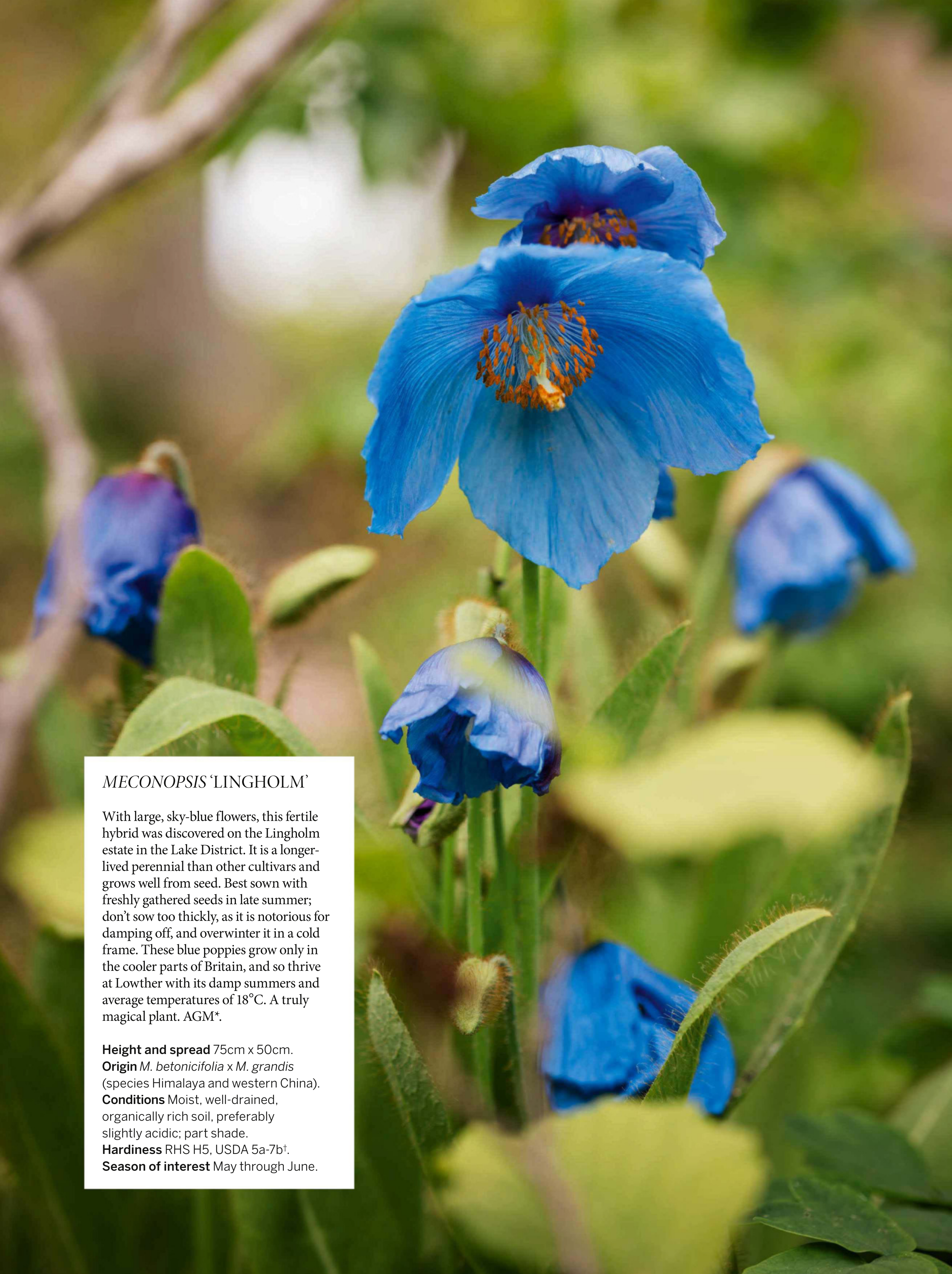


MECONOPSIS 'LINGHOLM'

With large, sky-blue flowers, this fertile hybrid was discovered on the Lingholm estate in the Lake District. It is a longer-lived perennial than other cultivars and grows well from seed. Best sown with freshly gathered seeds in late summer; don't sow too thickly, as it is notorious for damping off, and overwinter it in a cold frame. These blue poppies grow only in the cooler parts of Britain, and so thrive at Lowther with its damp summers and average temperatures of 18°C. A truly magical plant. AGM*.

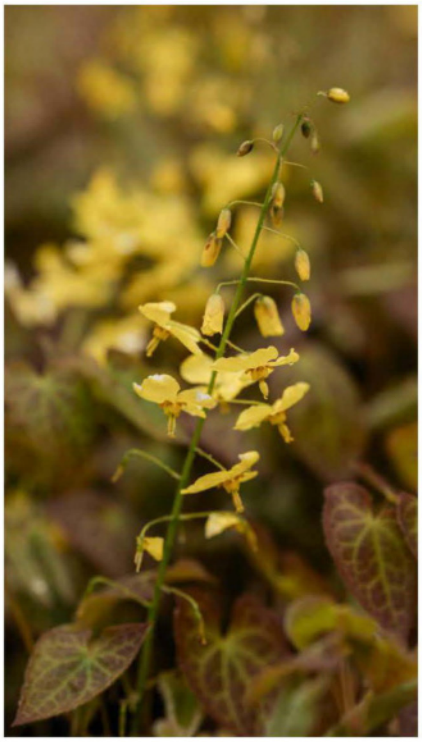
Height and spread 75cm x 50cm.
Origin *M. betonicifolia* x *M. grandis* (species Himalaya and western China).
Conditions Moist, well-drained, organically rich soil, preferably slightly acidic; part shade.
Hardiness RHS H5, USDA 5a-7b†.
Season of interest May through June.

Andrea Brunsendorf is head gardener at Lowther Castle & Gardens in Cumbria **lowthercastle.org**

May plants

Head gardener **Andrea Brunsendorf** takes pleasure in the drifts of luminous flowers, lacy umbellifers and fragrant woodlanders that grace the garden in late spring

PHOTOGRAPHS ANDREW MAYBURY



EPIMEDIUM X PERRALCHICUM 'FRÖHNLEITEN'

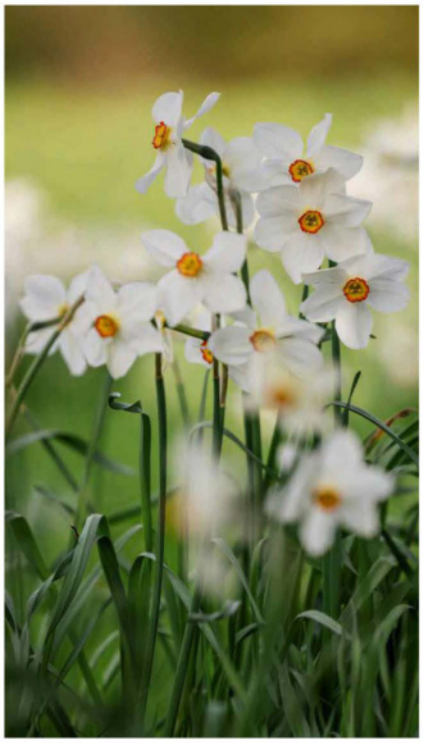
This hybrid was found in the alpine garden of Fröhnleiten, Austria, and was propagated by breeder Ernst Pagels. It is a rhizomatous perennial with airy clusters of distinct, bright-yellow flowers held just above the mounding foliage. The new leaves on wiry stems are marbled with bronze edges in spring, which reappear in the autumn. Cut back only if significant winter damage occurs to its foliage. It is very versatile and will even tolerate dry shade once established. AGM.

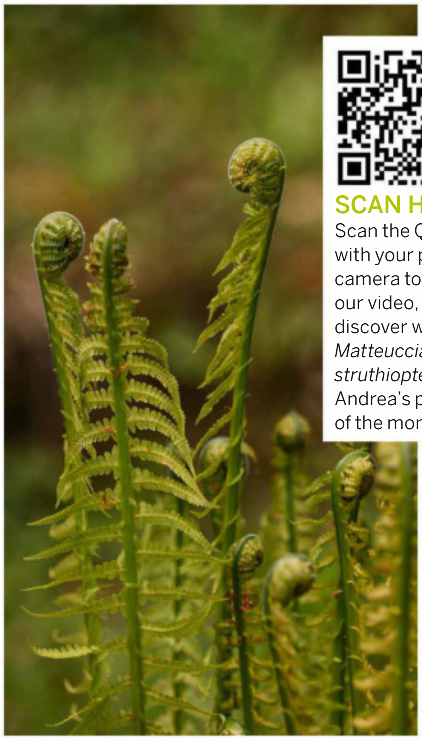
Height and spread 40cm x 60cm.
Origin Garden (species Caucasus, Algeria).
Conditions Moist, well-drained, organically rich soil, preferably slightly acidic; part to full shade and sheltered from cold winds.
Hardiness RHS H6, USDA 5a-9b.
Season of interest April to May for flowers; evergreen foliage year round.

NARCISSUS 'ACTAEA'

This enchanting pheasant's eye has a tall, delightfully fragrant white flower with a small, yellow cup edged in orange-red. It extends the daffodil season deep into May and is a good cut flower. This cultivar is often chosen to naturalise in damp, grassy meadows thanks to its unique tolerance for wet conditions. I like to see it in great swathes beneath apple trees in blossom. It pays to put some effort into reaching a good planting depth of 20cm in early autumn to ensure successful settlement and long-term floral reliability. AGM.

Height and spread 45cm x 10cm.
Origin Garden (species Spain to Ukraine).
Conditions Moist, well-drained, moderately rich soil; full sun to part shade.
Hardiness RHS H6, USDA 4a-8b.
Season of interest Late April through May.





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Scan the QR code with your phone camera to watch our video, and discover why *Matteuccia struthiopteris* is Andrea's plant of the month.

MATTEUCCIA STRUTHIOPTERIS

The bright-green, lace-shaped fronds arranged in shuttlecock rosettes are most beautiful before any summer heat or wind catches up with them. Later in the summer, smaller, brown, fuzzy, fertile fronds appear, persisting throughout the winter and especially pronounced with a layer of snow. This deciduous fern thrives in sheltered, damp conditions, where it will grow numerous new, small, furry trunks, which can be easily lifted and replanted in early spring to keep the colony in check. I love its seasonal transiency. AGM.

Height and spread 1.5m x 2m.
Origin France to Russian far east and Japan.
Conditions Moist, acid to neutral, organically rich soil; part to full shade.
Hardiness RHS H5, USDA 3a-7b.
Season of interest Mid-March through June for foliage; fertile fronds in winter.

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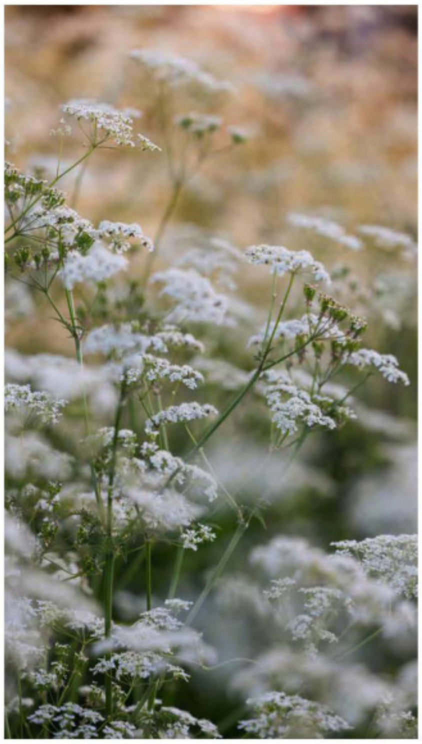
*Holds an Award of Garden Merit from the Royal Horticultural Society. †Hardiness ratings given where available.

Grown en masse, the delicate, umbelliferous flowers create white clouds against a blue sky, and the malty scent attracts many pollinators

ANTHRISCUS SYLVESTRIS

Cow parsley is a quintessential native for those dreamy English springs. I have introduced this short-lived perennial with fern-like foliage into many informal urban and rural garden settings. Grown en masse, the delicate, umbelliferous flowers create white clouds against a blue sky, and the floral, malty scent attracts many pollinators. Collect fresh seeds and sow direct in late summer or use a cold frame. Some deadheading is advisable as it is a prolific self-seeder, turning quickly into a thug. It will hybridise with the purple-leaved cultivar 'Ravenswing', so beware.

Height and spread 1.5m x 60cm.
Origin Europe, including Britain and Western Asia.
Conditions Moist, well-drained, organically rich soil; full sun to part shade.
Hardiness RHS H6, USDA 7a-10b.
Season of interest April through May.



JASON INGRAM

LUNARIA REDIVIVA

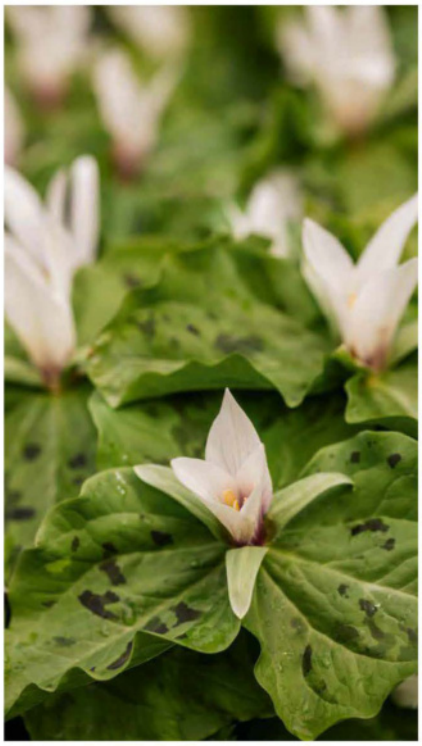
This beautiful woodlander forms self-supporting clumps and produces a profusion of sweet-scented, pale-mauve flowers that persist well into the summer. The fragrance is most intense at night, but I was first attracted to its pretty, elliptical, papery seedheads, which shimmer like small, silver half-moons above the dormant woodland floor in the winter sun. It is an excellent perennial with long seasonal interest that performs well in bright shade and will self-seed in optimum conditions. AGM.

Height and spread 90cm x 30cm.
Origin Europe.
Conditions Moist, well-drained, organically rich soil; full sun to shade, but best in part shade.
Hardiness RHS H7, USDA 5a-8b.
Season of interest May to July for flowers; September to February for seedheads.

TRILLIUM ALBIDUM

Three elegant, white sepals sit on a three-lobed, leaf-like bract mottled with brown spots. The flowers are rose-scented and often have pink throats. Trilliums are slow-growing, and once planted with other non-competing woodlanders, it can take two to four years to reach flowering size. I am thrilled to be the custodian of this captivating spring ephemeral brought to Lowther by the 5th Earl of Lonsdale from one of his western USA adventures more than 100 years ago. AGM.

Height and spread 40cm x 40cm.
Origin Western USA from California to Washington State.
Conditions Moist, well-drained, organically rich soil, preferably slightly acidic; part shade. Hates to dry out.
Hardiness RHS H5, USDA 4a-9b.
Season of interest Late April through May.



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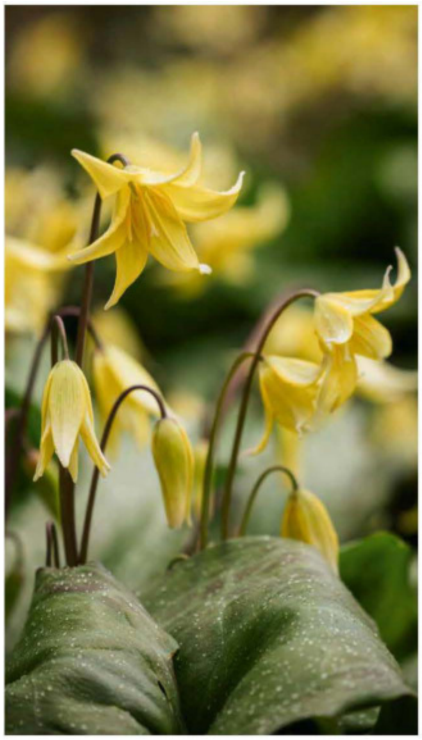
> Cowslips dominate the large wildflower panels at Lowther, forming a spectacular sight with the castle as a backdrop



ERYTHRONIUM 'PAGODA'

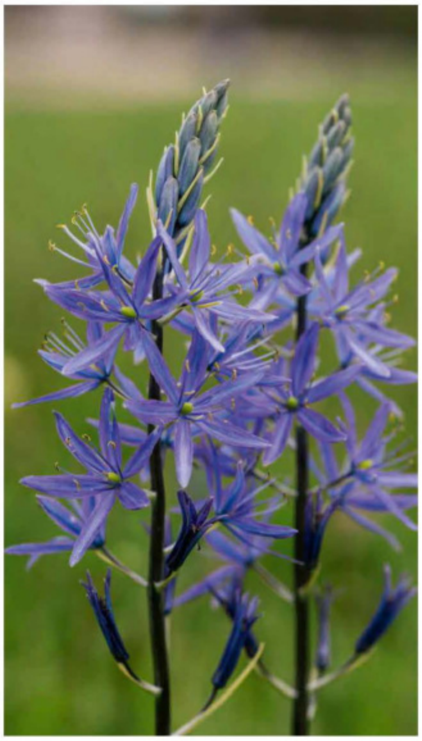
A popular, easy-to-grow hybrid between *E. tuolumnense* and *E. californicum* 'White Beauty', this yellow dog's-tooth violet is one of the tallest cultivars, with a distinct and elegant swept-back Turk's cap that sits over large, lush-green leaves. It self-seeds and naturalises well when happy, especially when the juvenile tubers don't get too hot. Watch out for overexcited perennials such as lungworts in the vicinity, as this atmospheric woodlander is not robust enough to compete with thuggish neighbours. AGM.

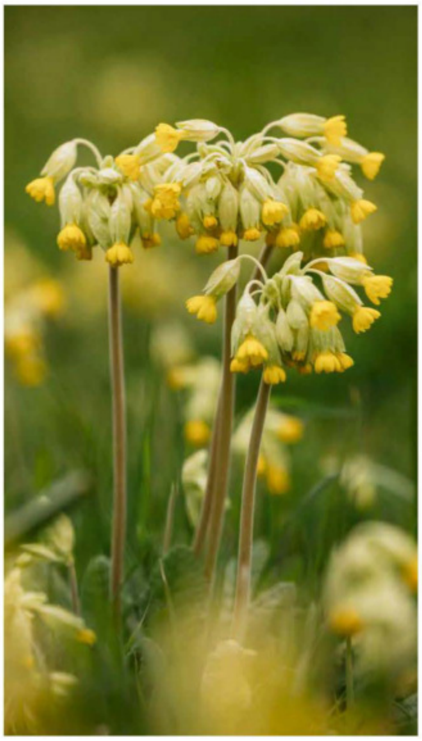
Height and spread 10cm x 35cm.
Origin Garden (species central California).
Conditions Moist, well-drained, organically rich soil, preferably slightly acidic; part to full shade.
Hardiness RHS H5, USDA 4a-9b.
Season of interest March through May.

CAMASSIA LEICHTLINII SUBSP. *SUKSDORFII* CAERULEA GROUP

This bulb will throw up tall, slender spikes with deep azure-blue, star-shaped flowers that emerge from a cluster of long, linear leaves. It thrives in heavy soil, especially in damp meadows and open woodlands, settling best in areas where competing grasses are a little weaker. Once a sound root system has developed, it will naturalise and form strong colonies, returning year after year to bridge the floral gap between spring and summer. Plant in early autumn, 8cm deep and 30cm apart.

Height and spread 1m x 20cm.
Origin West coast of British Columbia to California.
Conditions Moist, well-drained, organically rich soil; full sun to part shade.
Hardiness RHS H4, USDA 5a-9b.
Season of interest May to June.





PRIMULA VERIS

Cowslips dominate the large wildflower panels at Lowther, forming a spectacular sight in spring, especially with the castle as a backdrop. Like most primroses, it is a clump-forming perennial with a rosette of distinct, oblong and semi-evergreen leaves, and upright flower stems. The showy, nodding umbrellas of lemon-yellow flowers are fragrant, reminding me of ripe apricots. Cowslips self-seed and will easily naturalise under deciduous woody plants. In cooler climates, this primula will tolerate full sun. AGM.

Height and spread 25cm x 10cm.
Origin Europe, including Britain and Western Asia.
Conditions Moist, well-draining, and organically rich soil; part shade. Intolerant to standing water.
Hardiness RHS H5, USDA 3a-8b.
Season of interest April to May.

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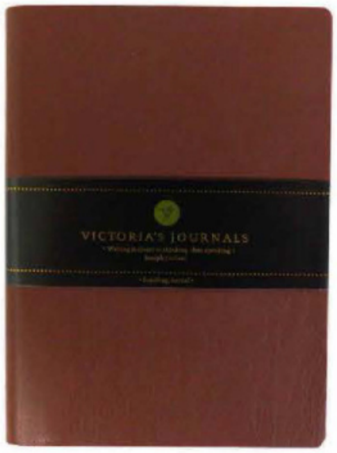

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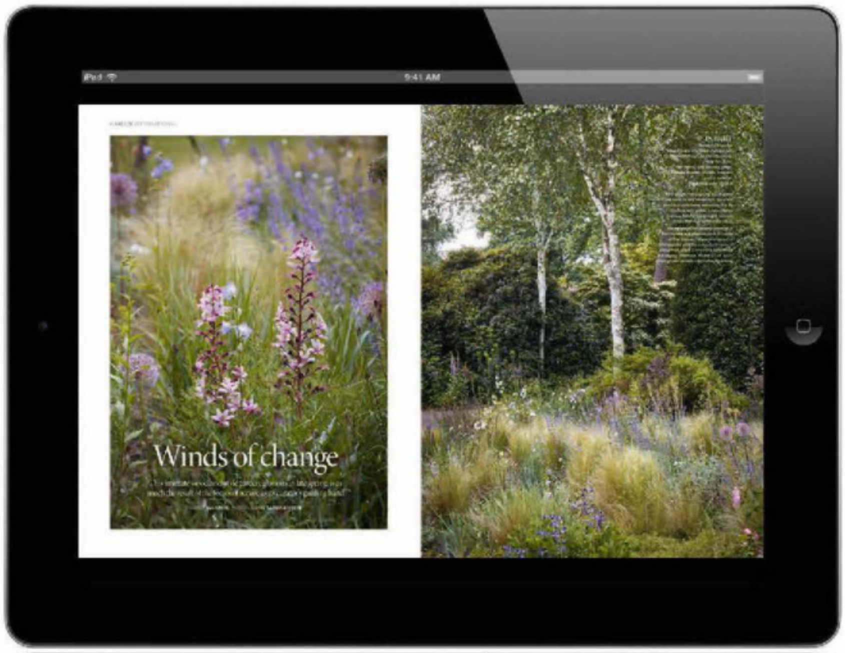
IT'S SHOW TIME
Your ultimate guide to the gardens, plants and trends at the Chelsea Flower Show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SHOW TIME

Never mind Christmas; for **Nigel Slater**, the most wonderful time of the year is the third week of May, which means only one thing: the RHS Chelsea Flower Show

ILLUSTRATION PAUL WEARING PORTRAIT JENNY ZARINS

It's always the first entry in my new diary, even before the birthdays of friends, anniversaries or holidays: the words 'RHS Chelsea'. I'm unsure what event might be so important that I would miss my annual trip to the 'Greatest Flower Show on Earth'. I think of Chelsea as the gardener's answer to Glastonbury, though usually with less mud and better loos.

Chelsea is very much a 'show', in that there is some expectation for the experience to be extraordinary and entertaining, and indeed it is. Where else I am going to see garden designers given licence to let their imaginations run riot, and see the latest varieties of hellebore, delphinium or greenhouse? The excitement starts the moment I get a message that tickets are due to be released. Yes, there is the buzz of the show, but it is more than that. The event heralds that summer is here once again. Our wisteria and roses will bloom again, our sweet peas will climb their sticks, and our pea pods will plump up. We know this, but it somehow becomes official after Chelsea.

The morning of the first day finds me as excitable as a kid at Christmas. Each area fills me with joy, be it the Great Pavilion (or the Marquee as I still call it) or the avenue of spectacular show gardens. It is not too far-fetched to liken the latter to the catwalks of Paris Fashion Week, where somewhat impractical but nevertheless fabulous clothes are paraded. Both are there to dazzle us, and places where a designer can push the boundaries of their creativity, taking their chance to astound and intrigue eager onlookers like me.

I occasionally hear mutterings about the impracticality of the gardens. Thank goodness, I think to myself, that someone has been given the chance to think outside the box, to have fun with plants and planting. This is what I really appreciate about the week-long event: no matter whether I like a garden or not, there will always be something to take away from it – an idea, a notion or fancy of something I want to do to my own urban patch. Spotting plants I would never have otherwise come across is a good enough reason for going. Whereas other shows are brilliant for buying plants and ▷

> Chelsea is the gardener's answer to Glastonbury, though usually with less mud and better loos

▷ meeting growers, Chelsea stimulates the imagination. It makes me rethink the possibilities of my own space.

To get the best from your day, you need to look closely, by which I mean, get as near as you can and really concentrate on the details. Each garden, large or small, contains so many tiny 'moments' and little vignettes. The underplanting deserves hours of study alone. Peep under the carefully chosen trees and you will find so much inspiration. I crouch down when I can, often discovering the most unusual groundcover I hadn't ever considered. It took a visit or two for me to realise that my own space has more bare patches than it should. Chelsea designers generally treat such barren bits as a missed opportunity and the generosity of planting is something that has changed my own perspective. They leave not an inch unused.

Some exhibitors never let you down. I'm thinking of Mr Kazuyuki Ishihara [see page 74], whose diminutive gardens are always a highlight – possibly *the* highlight, for me. A previous design saw him covering a Japanese tea house in moss cobbles. It was all I could do not to climb the fence and curl up among the plump, deep-green cushions. The man is a magician. There have been some deeply emotional moments too, such as when I stood in awe, rendered speechless at Dan Pearson's Chatsworth Garden in 2015. I may have had to hold back a tear or two and could happily have pitched my tent among the time-worn rocks, wildflowers and woodruff-lined stream and stayed there the entire week. Each year I spot a garden that makes me want to rip my own out and start again. Last year's was Sarah Price's Cedric Morris-inspired design with rose-pink pigmented walls and trademark Benton irises and grey poppies. A masterstroke.

The gardens are less 'spectacular' nowadays, which is a good thing, and doesn't mean to say less interesting. It means that the RHS takes the environmental impact of each exhibit seriously, and designers must now fulfil many extra criteria. Gone are the days of flying in 9m palms from the Middle East. None of which detracts from the show – if anything, it makes me enjoy it all the more as it has moved more in line with my own thinking. I rather enjoy watching visitors shaking their heads in disbelief at the Golds, or Silvers, they disagree with. But if Chelsea can't give us gardeners a bit of a shake, then what can?

Being city based, I also relish the opportunity to see nurseries in the Great Pavilion that I wouldn't normally get to. The new space created for first-time exhibitors, each stand barely larger than a dining table, is a welcome introduction. I rarely agree with the RHS Plant of the Year, but I would happily take the stunning *Agapanthus* Black Jack (= 'Dwaghyb02'), which won last year, its flowers as purple as a jar of damson jam, or *Viburnum plicatum* f. *tomentosum* Kilimanjaro Sunrise (= 'Jww5'), the winner in 2015, into my own plot.

I love my annual trip to Chelsea. For all the blue-sky thinking, there is a reassuring predictability to the show: the location of the Royal Hospital; the date of the third week of May; and the arrangement once inside, which helps regular visitors get around without missing anything.

Except, of course, that I do miss things. Am I the only one who watches the TV coverage and wonders if they've been at another show? The gardens appear very different when Monty Don is showing viewers around. And I know Carol Klein will always find one stand in the Pavilion I swear wasn't there when I did my 20,000 steps under the awnings. Well, there's always next year. □

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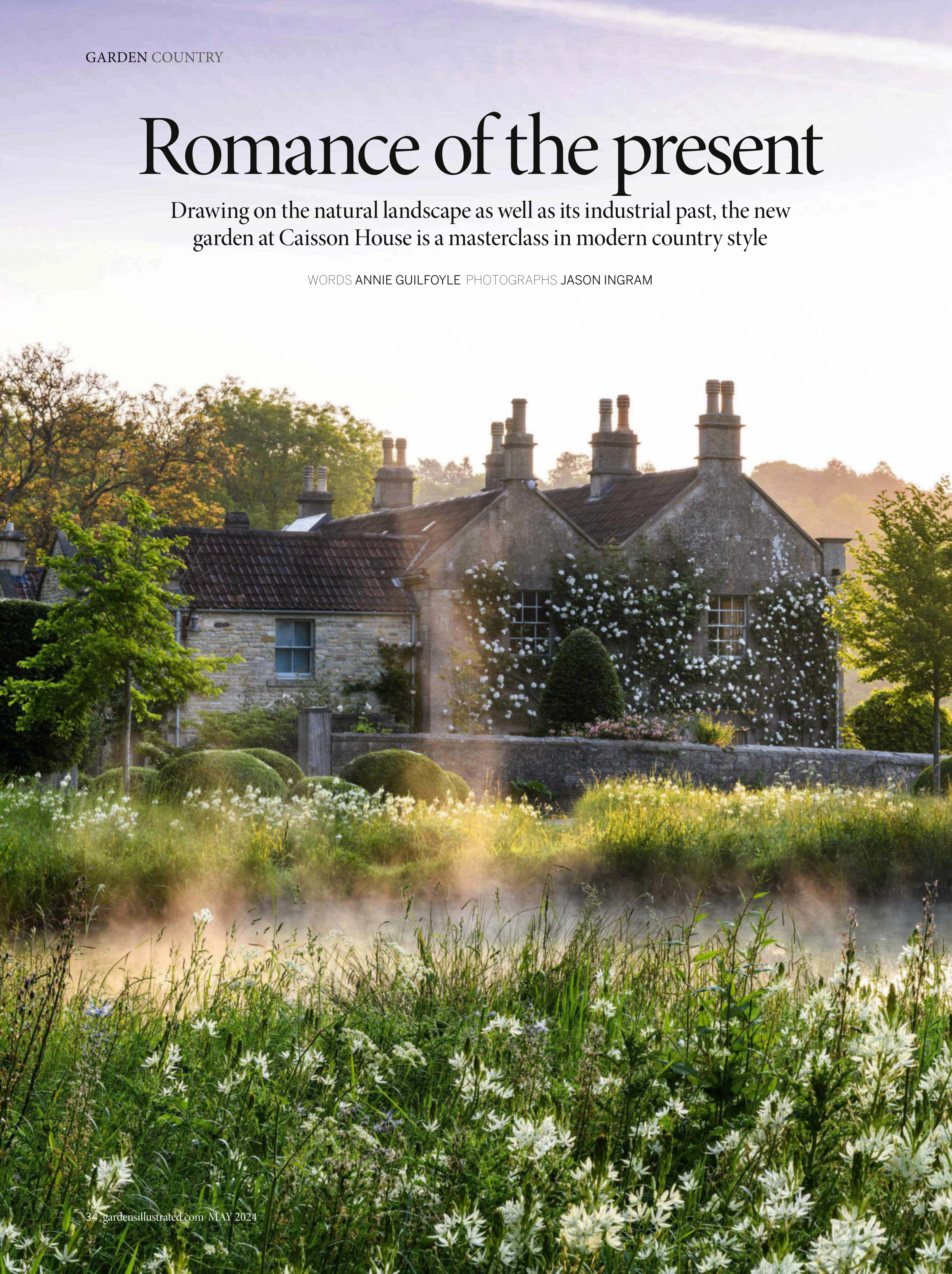
Friday Late, V&A South Kensington © Hydar Dewachi

Romance of the present

Drawing on the natural landscape as well as its industrial past, the new garden at Caisson House is a masterclass in modern country style

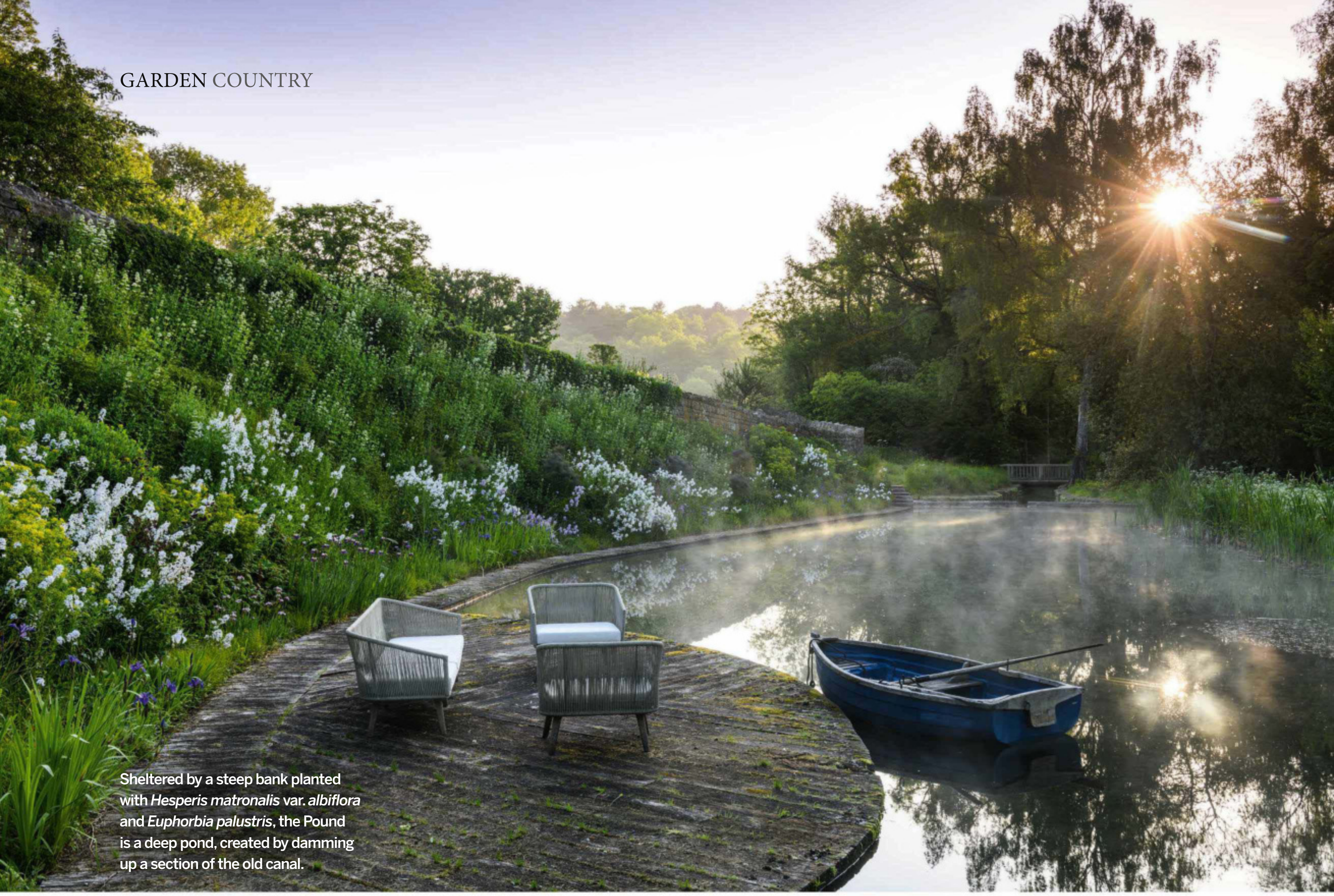
WORDS **ANNIE GUILFOYLE** PHOTOGRAPHS **JASON INGRAM**



IN BRIEF

Name Caisson House.
Where Somerset.
Size Two-and-a-half acres of 'curated' gardens surrounding the house, set among 40 acres.
Soil Loam mix of soil on limestone; neutral pH.
Climate Temperate.
Hardiness zone USDA 9.

Nestled in the bucolic countryside just two miles south of Bath, Caisson's garden is an enchanting mix of woodland, wildflower meadows and formal gardens, with white *Camassia leichtlinii* providing a loose counterpoint to neatly clipped topiary near the house.



Sheltered by a steep bank planted with *Hesperis matronalis* var. *albiflora* and *Euphorbia palustris*, the Pound is a deep pond, created by damming up a section of the old canal.

As you wind through the narrow lanes of north Somerset, derelict bridges, aqueducts, and disused tunnels and railway lines all tell the story of the prosperous past that once reigned in these rolling hills. In the early 19th century, this area, just south of Bath, had more than 80 working collieries producing 100,000 tons of coal per annum. The coal needed to be transported efficiently to Bath and beyond, and before the train took over this role, it was done by canal.

Caisson House, nestled in the Cam valley on the outskirts of Combe Hay, played a key role in the industrial history of the Somersetshire Coal Canal Company. In 1800, the house was built as the head office for the company's chief engineer. The name 'Caisson' came from a revolutionary lock design developed here, where the entire canal boat entered into a sealed, wooden box that was floated up and down in the lock. This system was supposed to displace less water and work faster than conventional locks, but the newfangled design failed and was abandoned in favour of the traditional lock. The now disused canal carves its way through the 40-acre grounds, sculpting the land and revealing no fewer than 15 locks.

Owners Amanda and Phil Honey met in London when Amanda joined Phil to grow his business, creating garden sets for the film and TV industry. After 20 years of working together, they returned to Somerset and discovered this unique property. "We fell in love with Caisson when we first laid eyes on it. Discovering the house, so near to Phil's childhood home, felt like fate," says Amanda. "It was run down, and the land was untamed and overgrown, yet we were drawn to the charm of the place – its decay held a certain enchantment. The place was spellbinding, romantic and filled with mystery."

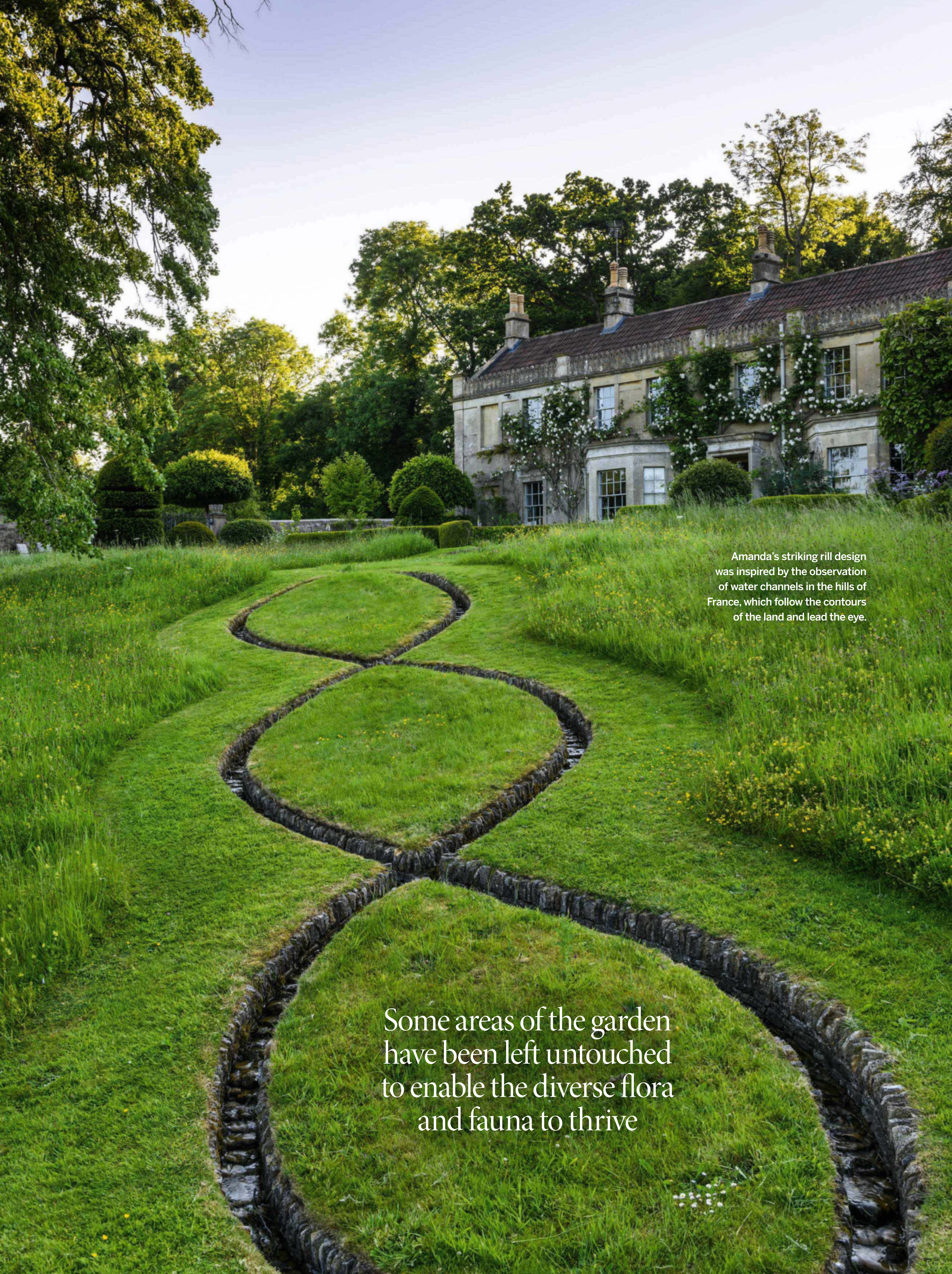
She and Phil make a good team, so taking on the management of such an enormous project was not that intimidating for them, she explains. "We had often built a forest, jungle or English garden from scratch in an empty studio in two days, so it was easy to visualise the end point before we began." The fact that the history of the garden was so inextricably linked to water, and yet now there was not a drop on site, provided the driving force for the design concept. "It was imperative to first build some ponds, two of which are now in parts of the old canal, and then to add evergreen and structural planting, which it distinctly lacked."

Every building had to be renovated. Brambles engulfed trees and smothered walls, and although the couple were determined to leave large areas undisturbed, close to the house they preferred the garden to be less wild. Soil health was restored using composted garden waste, and they left some areas untouched, so the diverse fauna and flora could thrive.

This initial phase took almost five years, as they carefully unravelled and unpicked the neglect. But because no chemicals had been used for a very long time, the flora and fauna flourished, and continues to do so – it almost appears as though Caisson has rewilded itself. Having started a new career as a garden designer, Amanda played a pivotal role in the garden's revitalisation, crafting a space that now exudes both artistry and romance. Her skills are complemented perfectly by Phil's expertise in landscaping and years of hands-on experience in set construction.

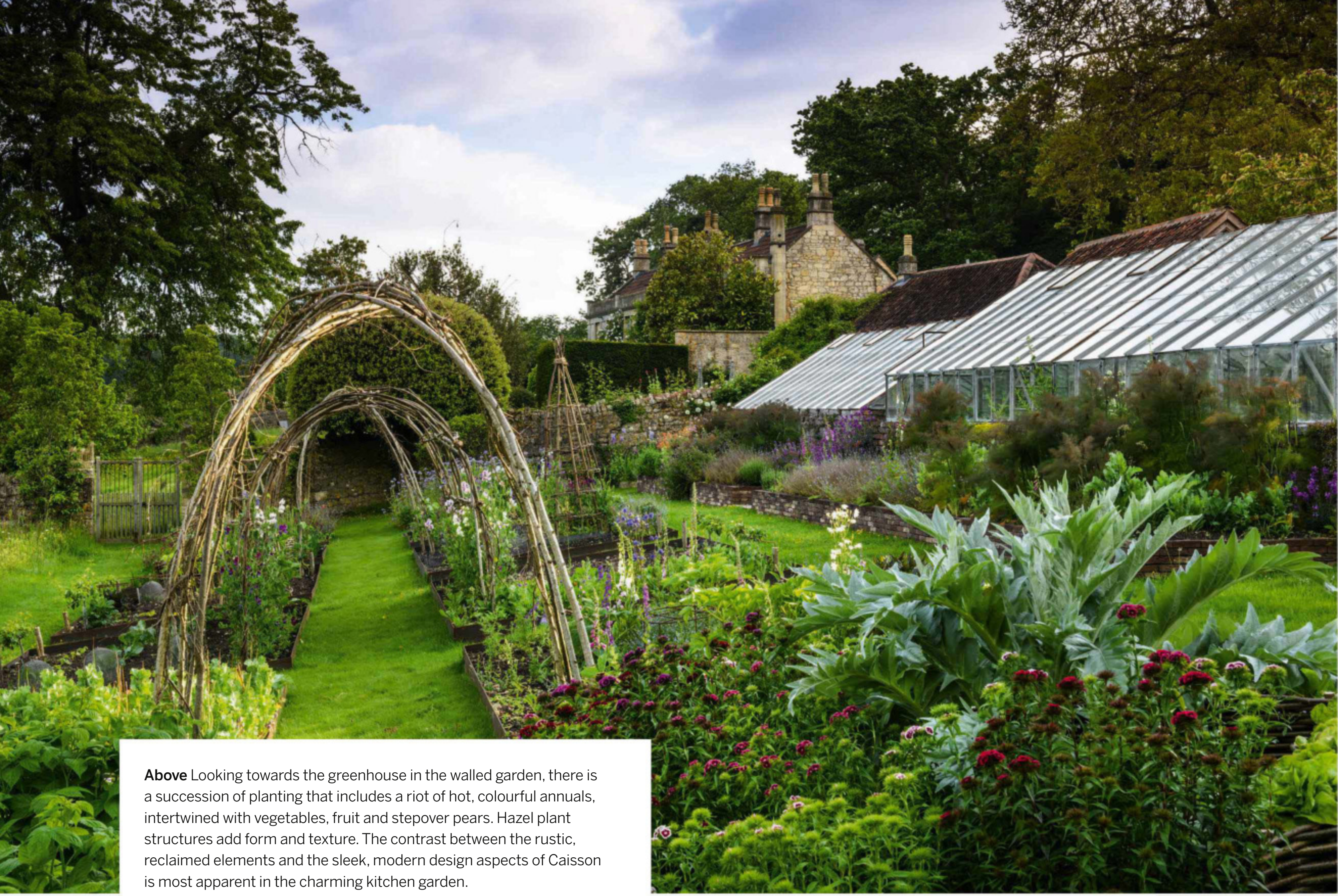
The first thing you notice as you arrive at Caisson House are the *Crataegus persimilis* 'Prunifolia Splendens' that line the drive, which leads to a large, round pond. Once dominated by scrap iron and brambles, it is now teeming with frogs and toads. Topiary forms of ▷

To continue turn to page 40



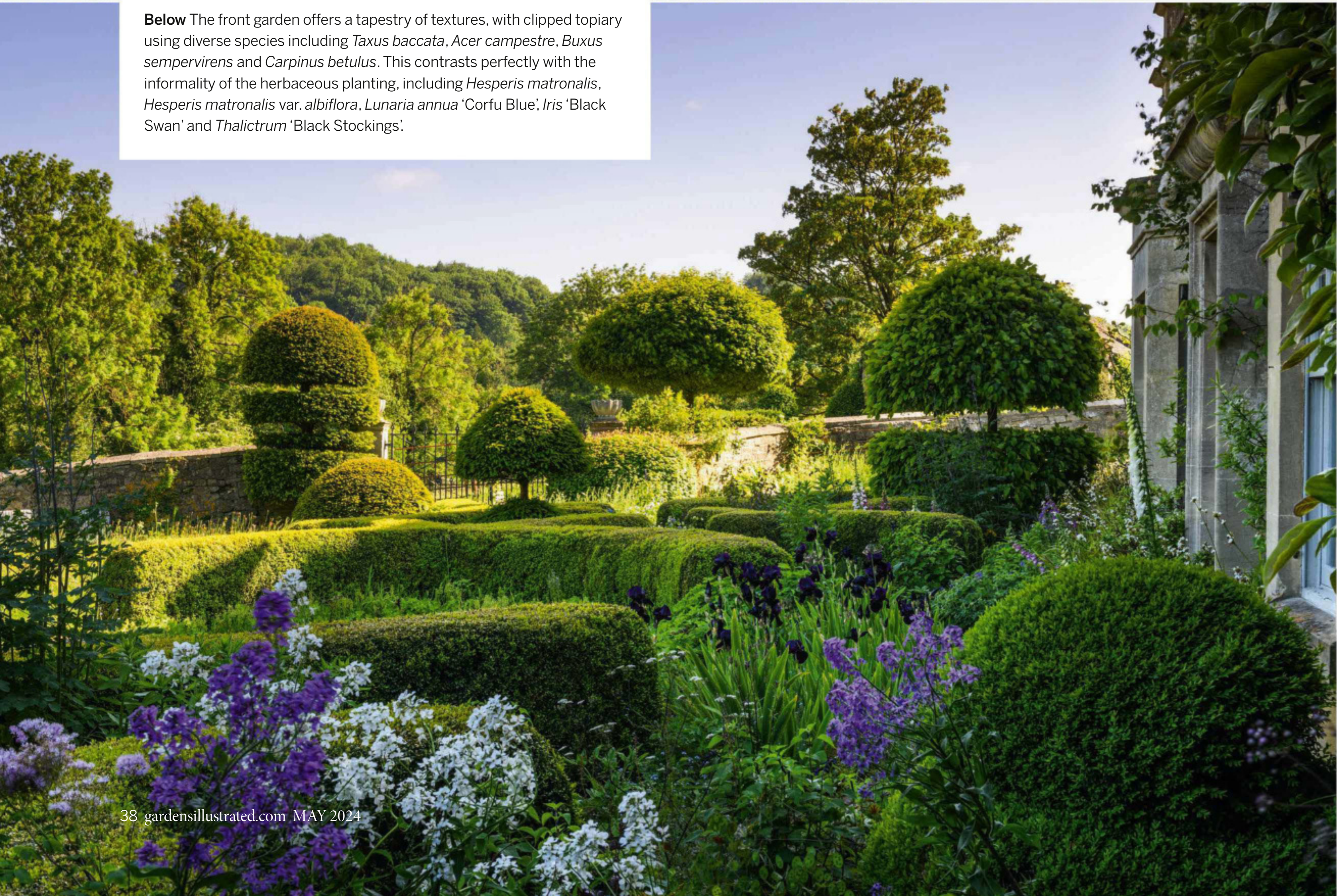
Amanda's striking rill design was inspired by the observation of water channels in the hills of France, which follow the contours of the land and lead the eye.

Some areas of the garden have been left untouched to enable the diverse flora and fauna to thrive



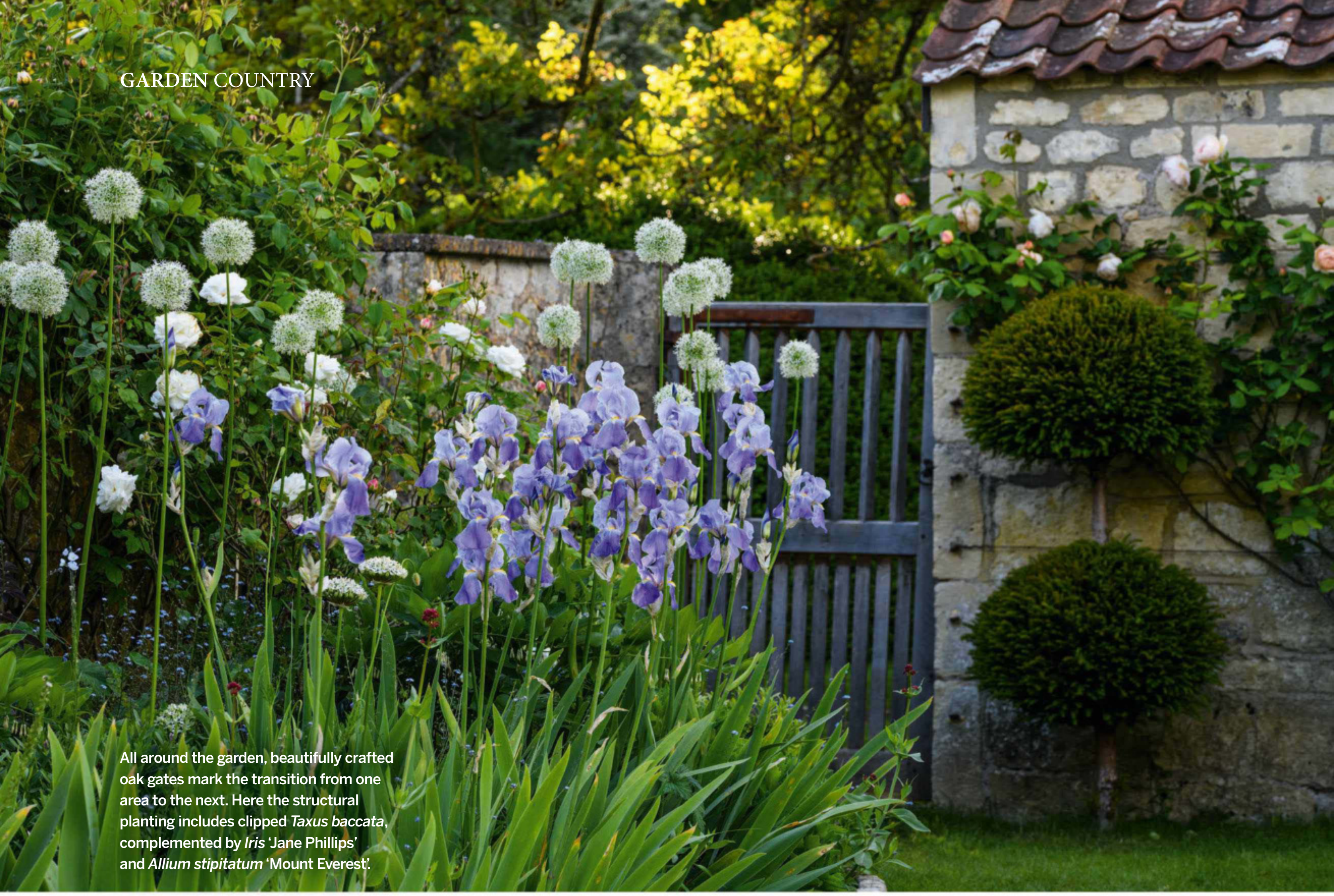
Above Looking towards the greenhouse in the walled garden, there is a succession of planting that includes a riot of hot, colourful annuals, intertwined with vegetables, fruit and stepover pears. Hazel plant structures add form and texture. The contrast between the rustic, reclaimed elements and the sleek, modern design aspects of Caisson is most apparent in the charming kitchen garden.

Below The front garden offers a tapestry of textures, with clipped topiary using diverse species including *Taxus baccata*, *Acer campestre*, *Buxus sempervirens* and *Carpinus betulus*. This contrasts perfectly with the informality of the herbaceous planting, including *Hesperis matronalis*, *Hesperis matronalis* var. *albiflora*, *Lunaria annua* 'Corfu Blue', *Iris* 'Black Swan' and *Thalictrum* 'Black Stockings'.



Above As buildings were repaired and rebuilt, Amanda and Phil inherited a fabulous reclamation yard of their own and set about using as many of the reclaimed materials as they could. Reusing the stone to make the cobbled paths and terraces ensured that these structures sat delicately in the landscape, resulting in a series of places to enjoy the garden at different times of day.

Below The kitchen terrace behind the house is framed with six ancient *Morus alba* trees, and the framing continues with *Malus* 'Evereste' that has been meticulously trained into an espalier. These elements enclose the terrace and the formal planting is softened with mainly white-flowering plants including *Rosa* Iceberg (= 'Korbin'), *Digitalis purpurea* f. *albiflora*, *Lupinus* 'Noble Maiden', *Astrantia major* 'Large White' and *Heuchera villosa*.



All around the garden, beautifully crafted oak gates mark the transition from one area to the next. Here the structural planting includes clipped *Taxus baccata*, complemented by *Iris* 'Jane Phillips' and *Allium stipitatum* 'Mount Everest'.

The garden's impressive stone walls offer an array of different microclimates and are covered in mosses, lichens and ferns

▷ *Taxus baccata*, *Carpinus betulus* and *Buxus sempervirens* provide formality along with clipped deciduous trees including *Prunus avium*, *Parrotia persica* and *Malus* 'Evereste'.

Alongside the house, an area that was formerly a gravel car park is now transformed with an oval pool and a sequence of interwoven rills. A bee orchid appeared on the front lawn in the first year and as a consequence, throughout the summer, only the paths are mown. The result is an abundance of orchids, including bee, pyramidal, common spotted and white helleborines, as well as indigenous wildflowers.

From the lawn, a flight of steps descends down a steep bank of *Euphorbia palustris*, *Hesperis matronalis* var. *albiflora* and *Lamium orvala*, eventually reaching an oak boardwalk that skirts around yet another pond. This was constructed by damming a section of the old canal with Bath stone walls. From here, there is a glorious view of an old stone bridge that crosses the canal and lock.

At this point, the garden becomes much wilder, with the now dry bed of the old canal flanked on either side by the imposing stone walls. Besides being one of the most striking features of the garden, these walls offer an array of different microclimates, and are covered in mosses, lichen and ferns.

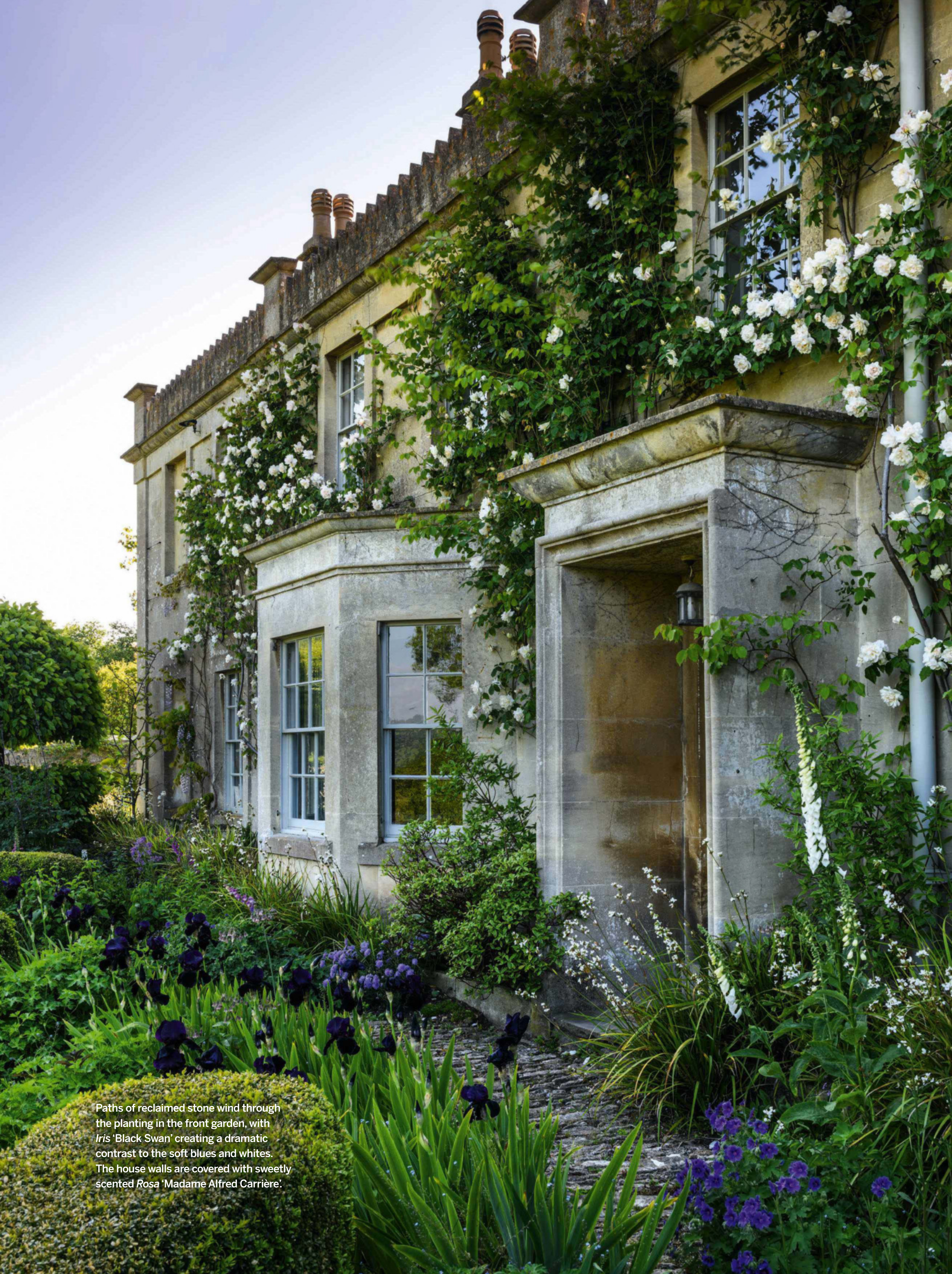
The old canal, now devoid of water, merges into ancient woodland and from here you can loop back towards the house through buzzing wildflower meadows. "During the spring and summer months, we leave approximately 80 per cent of the two-and-a-half-acre garden to long grasses in addition to the wildflower meadows that surround it," says Amanda. "It turns from the bare bones of the winter skeleton to a humming and buzzing hive of activity. We are a small team looking after the garden, so are thankful that there is now an ever-increasing awareness of regenerative farming and gardening, something we embrace wholeheartedly."

Beautifully crafted oak gates lead into the walled garden, where a large, semi-circular bench provides the perfect place to pause and take in the view across the orchard. The contrast between the rustic, reclaimed elements and the sleek, modern design aspects of Caisson House is most apparent in the charming kitchen garden and around the house.

"The true glory of respecting and not damaging the delicate ecosystem is now emerging," says Amanda. "We see a tremendous number of animals and insects, which is an absolute joy." Together she and Phil have found, and continue to fulfil, shared passion in this wonderfully evocative landscape. ◻

USEFUL INFORMATION

Address Caisson House, Combe Hay, Bath, Somerset BA2 7EF.
Web caissongardens.com **Open** On selected dates in May and June. Pre-booking essential. See website for details.



Paths of reclaimed stone wind through the planting in the front garden, with *Iris* 'Black Swan' creating a dramatic contrast to the soft blues and whites. The house walls are covered with sweetly scented *Rosa* 'Madame Alfred Carrière'.

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MILLIE SOUTER

Millie is currently a garden designer at Tom Stuart-Smith Studio and also head gardener of the Plant Library at the Serge Hill Project in Hertfordshire

PORTRAIT ANDREW MONTGOMERY

Earliest gardening memory Harvesting fresh Charlotte new potatoes with my sister in my grandmother's coastal garden in Scotland.

First plant love *Laburnum anagyroides*. We had one outside our kitchen window growing up. I always remember the warm yellow flowers appearing in late spring. And *Ornithogalum nutans*, which grew in wild abundance in the long grass.

Favourite 'weed' The ribwort plantain, *Plantago lanceolata*.

Inspiring mentors I would say a mix of painters and gardeners. Painters for how they observe and feel nature. Pierre Bonnard in particular. And Tom Stuart-Smith for his depth of understanding of plants and landscape, and how he harnesses that knowledge and experience in his gardens.

Horticultural heroes Tom, of course, and Piet Oudolf and James Hitchmough, all for their strength in plant knowledge and landscape and appreciation for plants and nature on a scale beyond just gardens and gardening.

Favourite garden and landscape Serge Hill and Hummelo for their planting, and Rousham for its sense of peace and calm. A landscape that has influenced me is the coastal landscape in Scotland where I'm from.

Three most worthwhile tips Enjoy it. Don't fret too much about making mistakes; it's all part of the process, and plants can be very forgiving. Use good-quality tools and look after them. Mulch, if you are growing plants that require high-nutrient value – and be generous.

Most valuable training My fine art degree, my year at Inchbald School of Garden Design, and consistently gardening and working with plants.

Dream plant destination Northeast Turkey for its meadows in July. I'm going this year.

Biggest challenge facing gardeners The environment and climate change, and how we work with it rather than fight it.

One easy thing to be more sustainable Have a really healthy compost heap and reduce watering. If plants demand too much water, compost them and replace them with tougher, more drought-resilient plants.

Guiding principles Nature has guided everything for me and been at the root of how I approach all gardening tasks. As a gardener I want to help plants perform and be the best version of themselves.

In what direction do you see horticulture heading? We need to align ourselves more closely with climate change and how we create and maintain spaces with ecosystems that are as diverse as possible. Our planting palette will have to adapt to this, which is something we must embrace.

Do you have a particular aim in your gardening career? I'd like to see more plants in the wild.

Contact studio@milliesouter.com
@millie_souter

> Don't fret too much about making mistakes; it's all part of the process, and plants can be very forgiving

Stroke Association

The road to recovery

This year the Stroke Association makes its debut appearance at the RHS Chelsea Flower Show with the restorative Garden for Recovery

For over 100 years the RHS Chelsea Flower Show has been a mecca for horticulture lovers. The 2024 event promises to be equally magnificent with show-stopping designs and floral displays. Attractions include displays by both renowned Chelsea veterans and exciting newcomers, as well as floristry and floral displays and gardens supported by Project Giving Back.

Launched in 2021, Project Giving Back funds gardens by charitable organisations to secure a place at the Chelsea Flower Show. This year the show will feature 15 supported gardens including the Stroke Association's first appearance with its Garden for Recovery.

The garden is the work of acclaimed landscape designer, writer and stroke survivor Miria Harris. The designer used her own story and the experiences of other stroke survivors as the foundation for creative inspiration.

"I survived a stroke at the beginning of 2019," says Miria. "It left me with aphasia, the inability to speak and form words properly. I didn't know what was happening and I thought I was losing my mind."

The emotional trauma and her experience of recovery informs the concept, design and planting choices within the Stroke Association's Garden for Recovery. Let's explore the garden to discover more…

Sending a message

"A stroke doesn't discriminate, it can strike anyone, young or old, at any time and it affects people in a multitude of different ways," says Miria. "The only communal experience is the trauma… all survivors of stroke will need time and space to recover, to process the trauma and reconnect with family and loved ones." Taking the

Miria has chosen honesty (*Lunaria annua*) with its magenta flowers to bring a bright pop of colour to the garden.

The North American grass *Chasmanthium latifolium* will add a tactile and calming auditory quality when it rustles in the breeze.

effects of trauma as a guiding theme, the garden has been designed as a peaceful, sensory space that aims to provide respite for survivors, while acknowledging the distress of the experience.

"The main focus for the Stroke Association's Garden for Recovery was to create a calm, sensory space where visitors will be able to take a breath, rest and be transported away from the built environment of hospitals into an immersive natural space," says Miria.

The circuitous nature of recovery for stroke survivors is another theme that sits at the heart of the garden. Recovery, says Miria, is not "straightforward or perfect – but it is possible". The garden with its curved and interconnected pathways emphasises the importance of recognising the meandering nature of the ups and downs of rehabilitation after a stroke. "The garden emphasises the non-linear nature of stroke recovery," says Miria.

Natural recuperation

Windswept pine trees frame a softly contoured landscape, gently curved paths lead visitors through the garden and naturally built walls carve out spaces to rest in privacy. The Stroke Association's Garden for Recovery is a landscape that promotes respite and calm reflection.

The soothing presence of a wildlife pond and the gentle trickle of a stream are a world away from the clinical experience of having a stroke. They are a metaphor, says Miria, for the "mental, physical and emotional connections that have to be rebuilt". Colour is used as an aid to visitors with pink, orange, green, yellow and purple helping to differentiate routes through the garden. "Loose muted rainbow colour blocked zones, using shrubs, perennials and annuals help visitors find focus without cluttering the space."

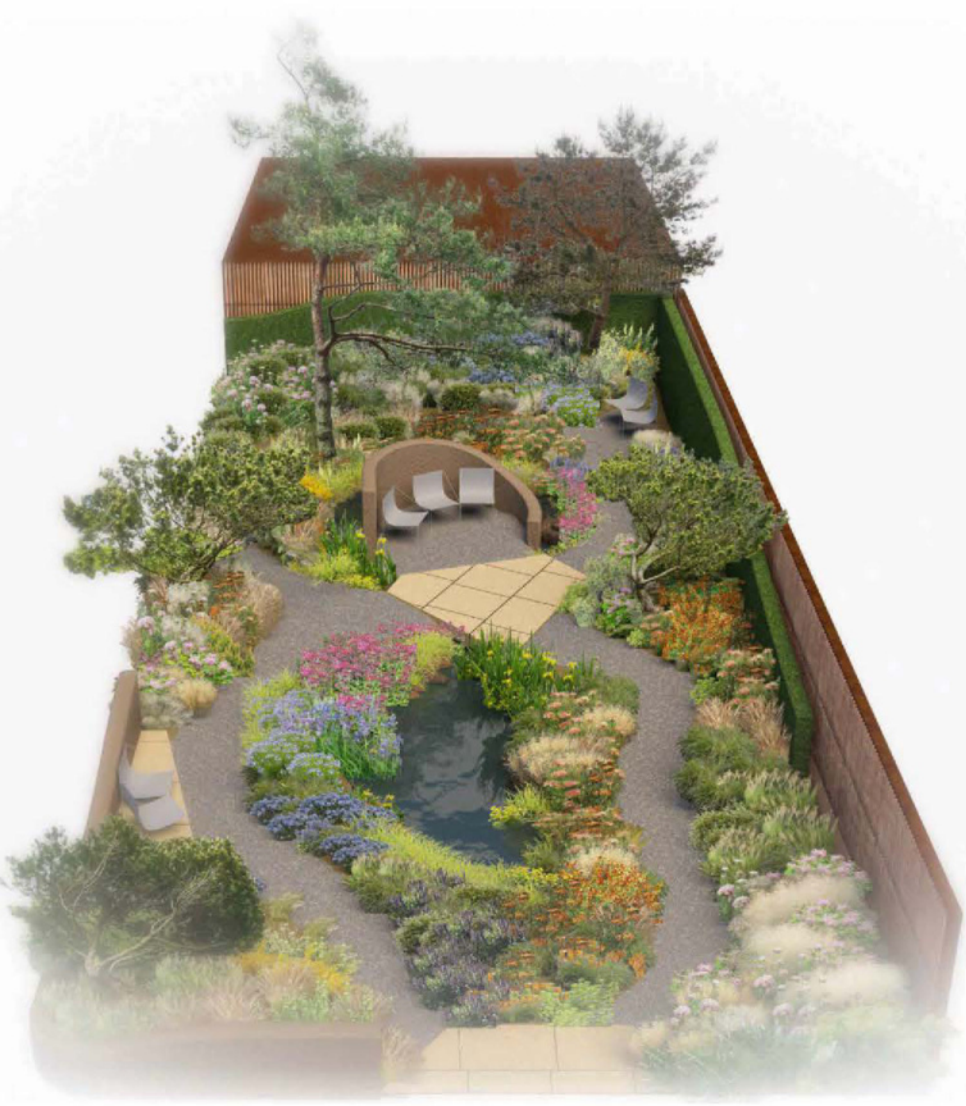
The physical and visual difficulties that might be experienced by stroke survivors has also been considered in the topography of the garden. Colour, fragrance and the sound of water is used to help guide those with visual or mobility impairment. Miria has also avoided overusing architecture, rather prioritising "an atmosphere of reconnection with nature".

A lasting legacy

Miria's design aims to mirror the Stroke Association's vision to support stroke survivors to achieve their best possible recovery. Currently, the Stroke Association can only reach one third of those in need. The charity is hoping its presence at the show will help it achieve its new goal of reaching everyone with stroke support as quickly as possible.

Beyond the RHS Chelsea Flower Show, Project Giving Back gardens enjoy longevity. Once the gates shut on the show on 25 May the Stroke Association's Garden for Recovery will settle in its permanent home at the stroke unit in Chapel Allerton Hospital, Leeds. A place of connection and rest for stroke survivors and their families.

"Not only will it increase the biodiversity of the landscape," says Miria, "it will support recovering stroke patients with direct access to nature and the positive impact on well-being that comes with it for many years to come."



The buttercup-yellow flowers of marginal aquatic *Ranunculus flammula*, will attract plenty of pollinators.

Miria has included flax (*Linum perenne*) as flaxseed oil is rich in omega-3 fatty acids that can improve brain function.

Every five minutes in the UK a life is shattered, and a family is torn apart by stroke. If stroke has affected you, or someone you love, you'll know just how devastating it can be. You can help change the story, by leaving a gift in your Will. To discuss including a gift in your Will, or to talk more about the idea, contact the Legacy team at the Stroke Association. Email legacy@stroke.org.uk or call the Legacy team directly on 020 7566 1505.

EREMURUS

Despite their reputation for being hard to grow and infuriatingly easy to kill, foxtail lilies are spectacular and desirable plants for sunny borders or gravel gardens with well-drained soil

WORDS **MATTHEW WILSON**

FACT FILE

What Bulbous perennials. Commonly known as desert candles or foxtail lilies. A genus made up of 59 species.

Season Early to midsummer.

Size Up to 2.5m high (flower spike), 50cm-1m across.

Conditions Well-drained soils, pH neutral, acid or alkaline, full sun and a sheltered spot.

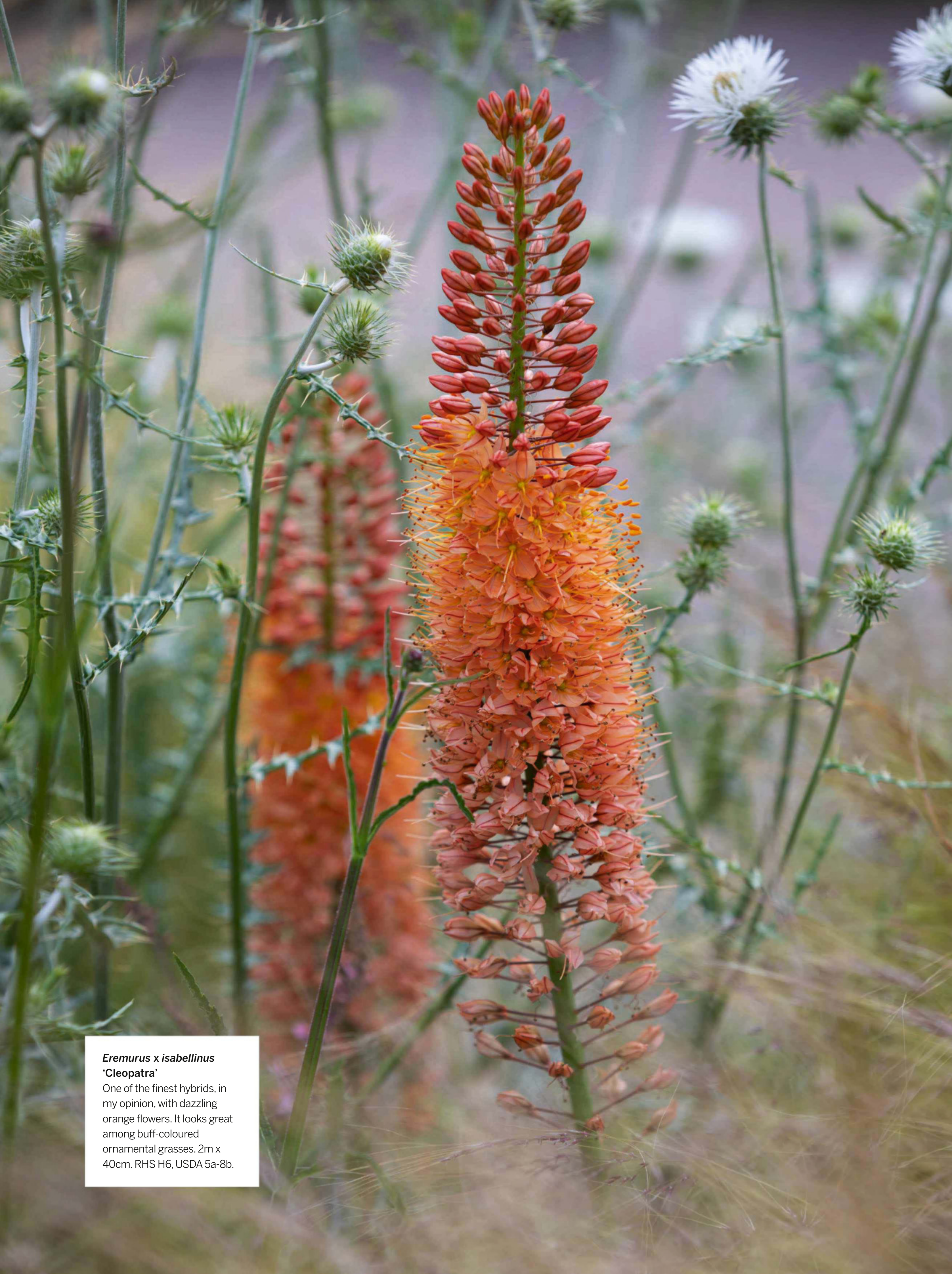
Origins Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, northwest China.

Hardiness Given the right conditions, *Eremurus* are hardy throughout the UK and suitable for gardens in USDA zones 5a to 8b.

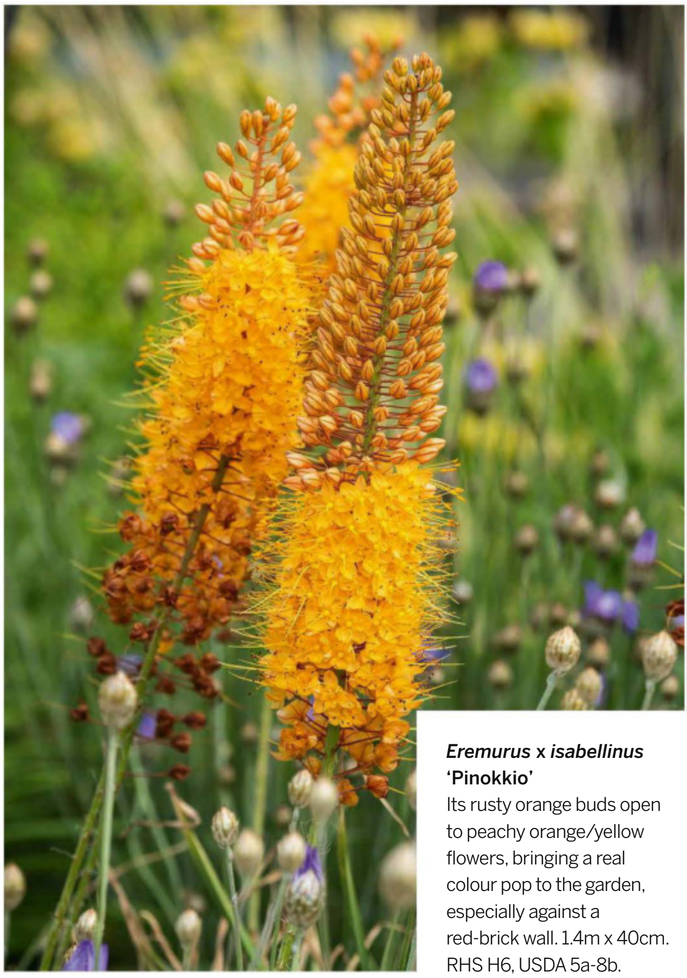
*Holds an Award of Garden Merit from the Royal Horticultural Society.
[†]Hardiness ratings given where available.

Eremurus himalaicus
I planted this in the Dry Garden at RHS Hyde Hall, where it still thrives. A truly statuesque beauty with white flowers on tall spikes. Height and spread: 2.5m x 45cm. RHS H6, USDA 5a-8b[†].

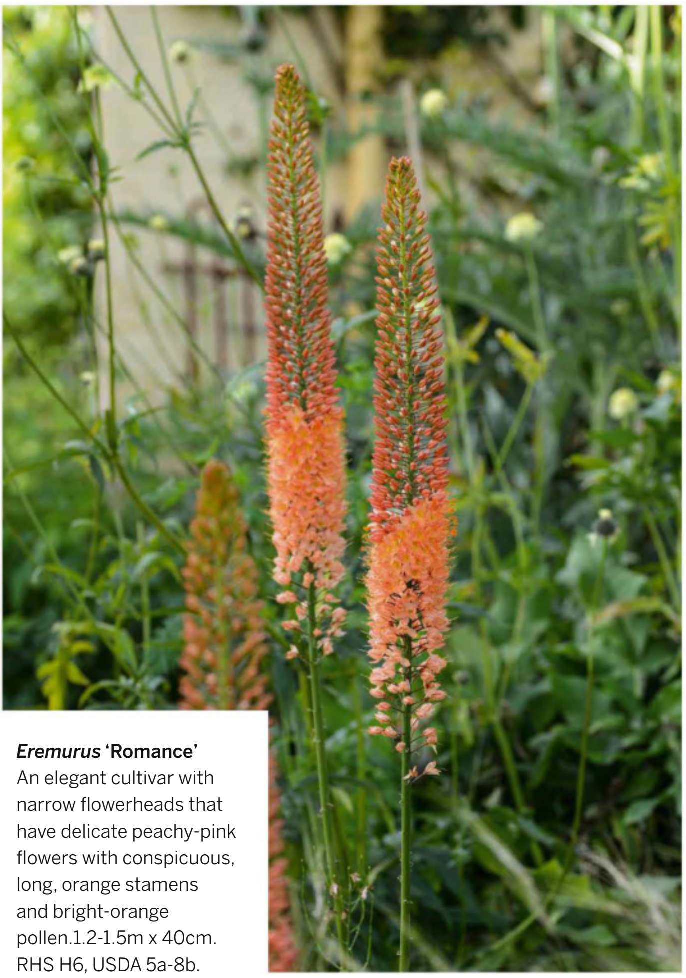
RICHARD BLOOM



Eremurus **x *isabellinus*** **'Cleopatra'**
One of the finest hybrids, in my opinion, with dazzling orange flowers. It looks great among buff-coloured ornamental grasses. 2m x 40cm. RHS H6, USDA 5a-8b.



***Eremurus* x *isabellinus* 'Pinokkio'**
Its rusty orange buds open to peachy orange/yellow flowers, bringing a real colour pop to the garden, especially against a red-brick wall. 1.4m x 40cm. RHS H6, USDA 5a-8b.



***Eremurus* 'Romance'**
An elegant cultivar with narrow flowerheads that have delicate peachy-pink flowers with conspicuous, long, orange stamens and bright-orange pollen.1.2-1.5m x 40cm. RHS H6, USDA 5a-8b.

Picture the scene. Dawn breaks over the desolately beautiful Tien Shan and Pamir Mountains of Central Asia. Miles of dusty, rubble-strewn desert, seemingly empty of any living thing. And then the half-light illuminates the tall inflorescences of hundreds upon hundreds of plants, punctuating the arid land, reaching skyward on stout stems nearly 2m tall, smothered in lightly fragrant flowers: *Eremurus*.

My introduction to *Eremurus* came closer to home. In my first summer as curator of RHS Garden Hyde Hall in Essex, back in June 2000, the sight of more than 600 *Eremurus robustus* in a west-facing border was quite a treat. What was even more remarkable is that those 600-plus plants were all self-seeded from just a dozen original crowns, planted in the late 1960s by the founding owners of the garden, Helen and Dick Robinson.

While Essex isn't exactly Uzbekistan, it is one of the driest parts of the UK – and that west-facing border gets baked by the sun. The soil there, in contrast to the heavy clay across the rest of the site, has some gravel in it and drains well. And the only real competition the *Eremurus* had there were some old shrub roses, meaning there was plenty of space around the crowns, good air circulation and limited shade.

There are 59 accepted species of *Eremurus*, although less than half are widely commercially available, and of those, some are primarily available as cut flowers rather than garden plants. Their flower colours range from white through pale pink to yellow and orange. The role of these spectacular plants is of garden shooting stars rather than stolid ensemble players, as even the longest-lasting cultivars are only in bloom for a matter of three or four weeks.

> The role of these spectacular plants is of garden shooting stars rather than ensemble players

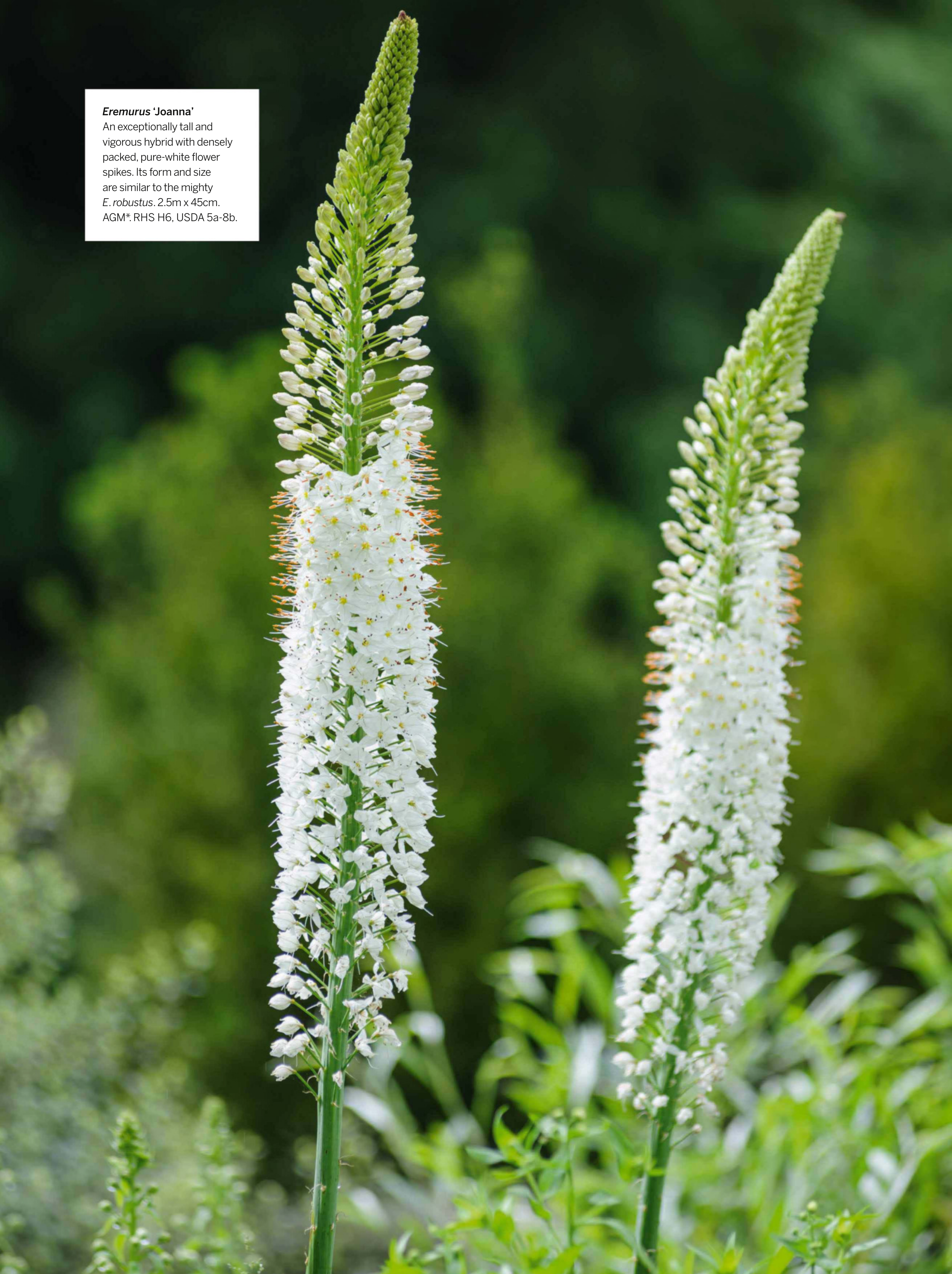
Growing away rapidly in spring, they form knee-high rosettes of fleshy, grassy leaves before erupting into flower in early to midsummer. The flower spikes rise up to 1-2.5m depending on species and cultivar, each spike studded with tiny, star-shaped flowers arranged concentrically around the stem. The number of these flowers is quite mind-boggling – a single *Eremurus robustus* stem might have as many as 800. The flowers fade from the bottom of the flower spike to the top.

These tiny flowers are lightly fragrant and their pollen and nectar are a magnet for bees. A characteristic of the flower spikes is their propensity to wander off from a strictly vertical path. The resulting kinks are all part of their charm and the reason for one of their common names: foxtail lily.

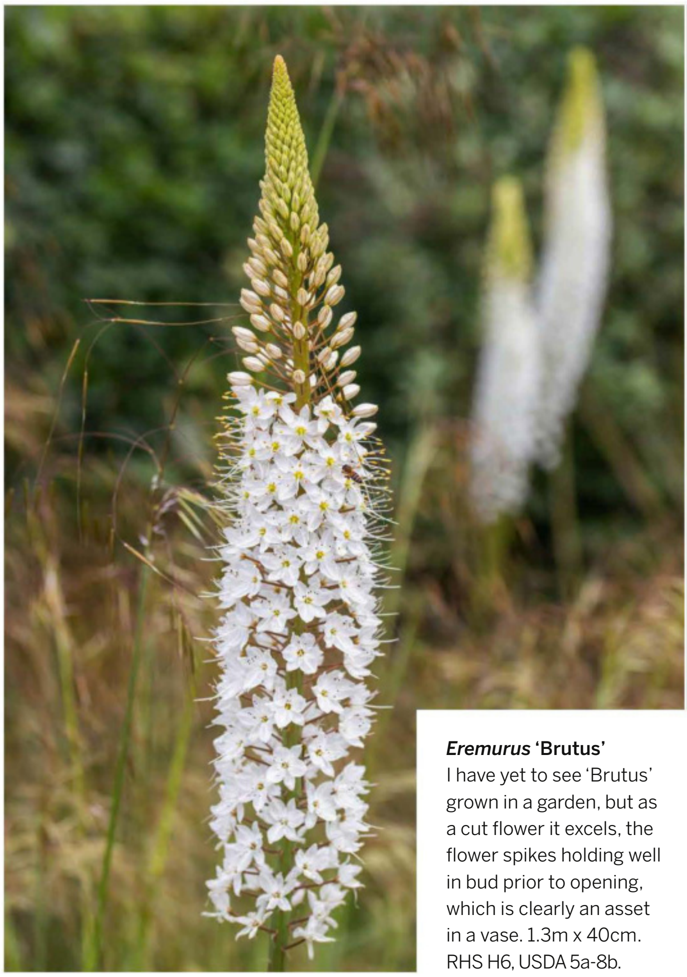
Eremurus foliage is already browning off and declining by the time they are in bloom, dying back from the tips. This means an inevitable 'hole' in the border once the plant has finished flowering, and it isn't really one that can be filled with other plants without compromising the good air circulation and summer-sun baking the dormant crowns need.

To continue turn to page 53 ▷

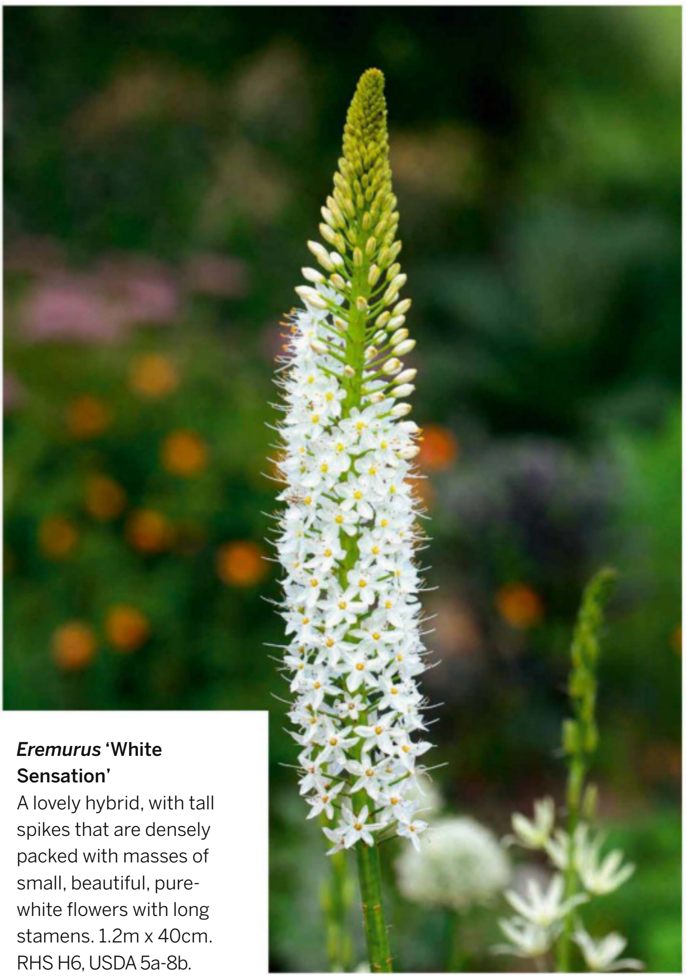
RICHARD BLOOM; ROB WHITWORTH / GAP PHOTOS; JASON INGRAM.



***Eremurus* 'Joanna'**
An exceptionally tall and vigorous hybrid with densely packed, pure-white flower spikes. Its form and size are similar to the mighty *E. robustus*. 2.5m x 45cm. AGM*. RHS H6, USDA 5a-8b.



***Eremurus* 'Brutus'**
I have yet to see 'Brutus' grown in a garden, but as a cut flower it excels, the flower spikes holding well in bud prior to opening, which is clearly an asset in a vase. 1.3m x 40cm. RHS H6, USDA 5a-8b.



***Eremurus* 'White Sensation'**
A lovely hybrid, with tall spikes that are densely packed with masses of small, beautiful, pure-white flowers with long stamens. 1.2m x 40cm. RHS H6, USDA 5a-8b.

How to grow *Eremurus*

- **To get the best out of *Eremurus* it is essential to plant in a sheltered spot in full sun and well-drained soil.** If you can't provide these key ingredients, try something else. As they start into growth early, and their foliage is soft, they can get hit hard by a late frost, so avoid planting in a frost pocket.

- ***Eremurus* are best bought and planted as dormant crowns in late spring** – they are also offered in autumn by some suppliers. Their root systems and crown look like a child's attempt at drawing a starfish; thick, fleshy fingers of root arrayed from the central bud. Planting the roots and crown at the correct depth is critical to successful establishment.

- **There's no need to dig a deep hole when planting *Eremurus*.** A shallow, but wide excavation, at least the size of a dinner plate is ideal. Mix a few handfuls of horticultural grit into the excavated soil, and some soil improver – something light such as spent mushroom compost. Despite their thrifty origins, they will benefit from the additional nutrients and soil conditioning.

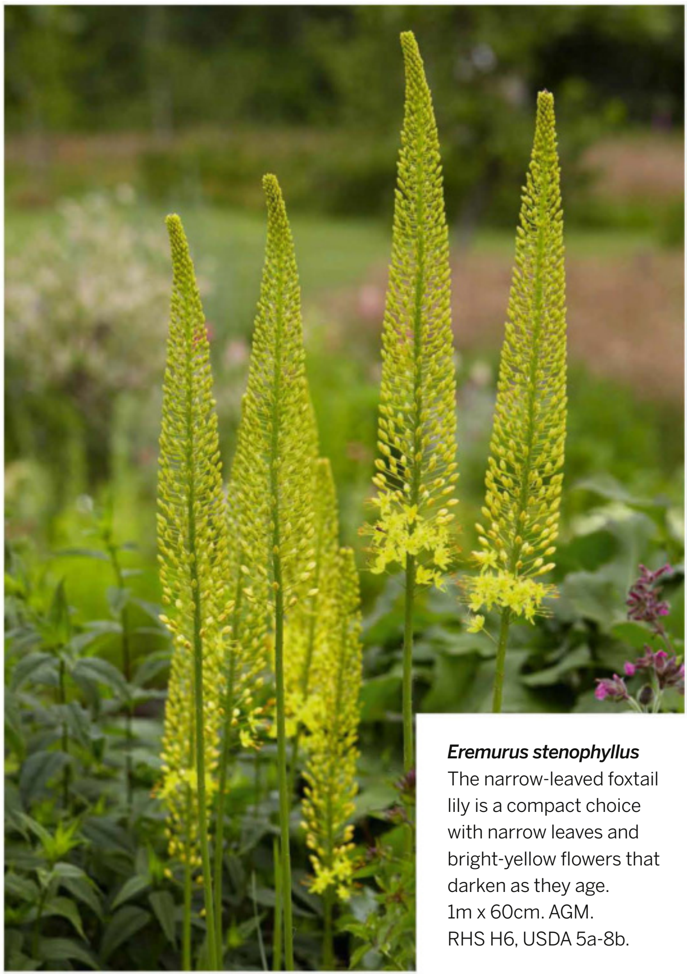
- **When planted the crown should be only just below the soil.** Plant so the tip of the crown is visible to make absolutely sure you haven't accidentally buried it. As for those finger-like roots, they should be spread out over the surface of the excavation and the improved soil firmed back over them so they are just a few centimetres below the surface.

- **After planting, mulch around the crown with more horticultural grit, but don't cover the crown itself.** This mulch will have a secondary benefit of making it obvious where the plants are once they have died back.

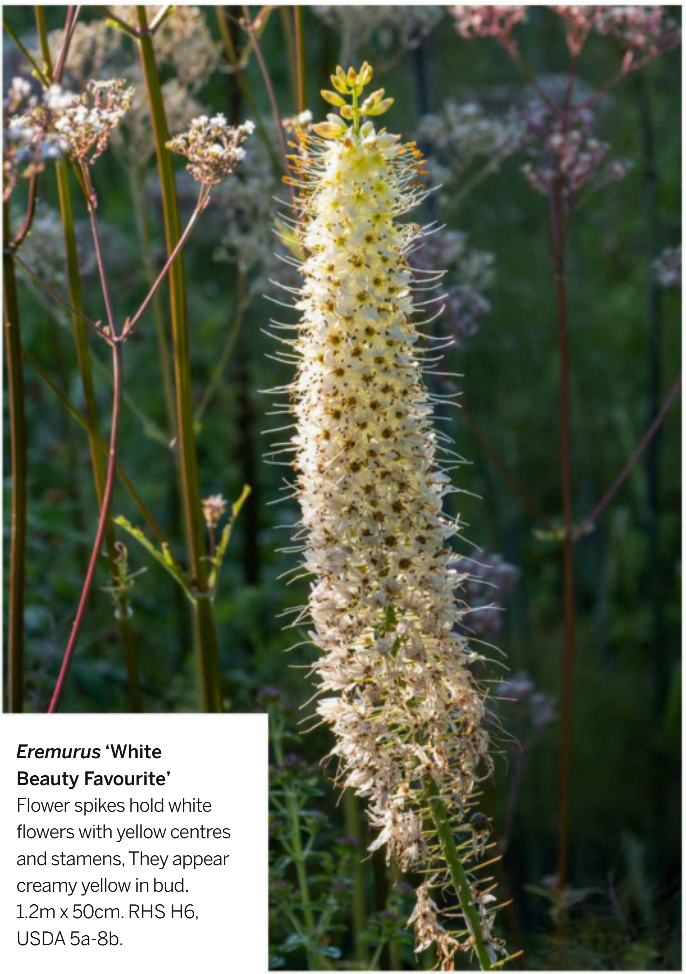
- **If you can't wait to plant bareroot dormant crowns, *Eremurus* can be bought as potted crowns.** But a word of warning, potting on inevitably means the roots end up pointing downwards in the pot, rather than in their optimal horizontal position. This prevents the roots from being well baked in summer, compromises drainage and can result in rotting. On really well-drained soil the comparatively rich compost that a potted plant usually comes in can create a sump effect, which again causes rot. If you do buy as potted plants, gently tease the compost away from the roots so they can be planted correctly.

- **Propagation is by seed in autumn**, with the time to flower from sowing around four years. Mature clumps can be carefully divided after flowering and the divisions planted immediately in prepared ground. Watch out for slugs and snails that can damage the emerging foliage and crowns.

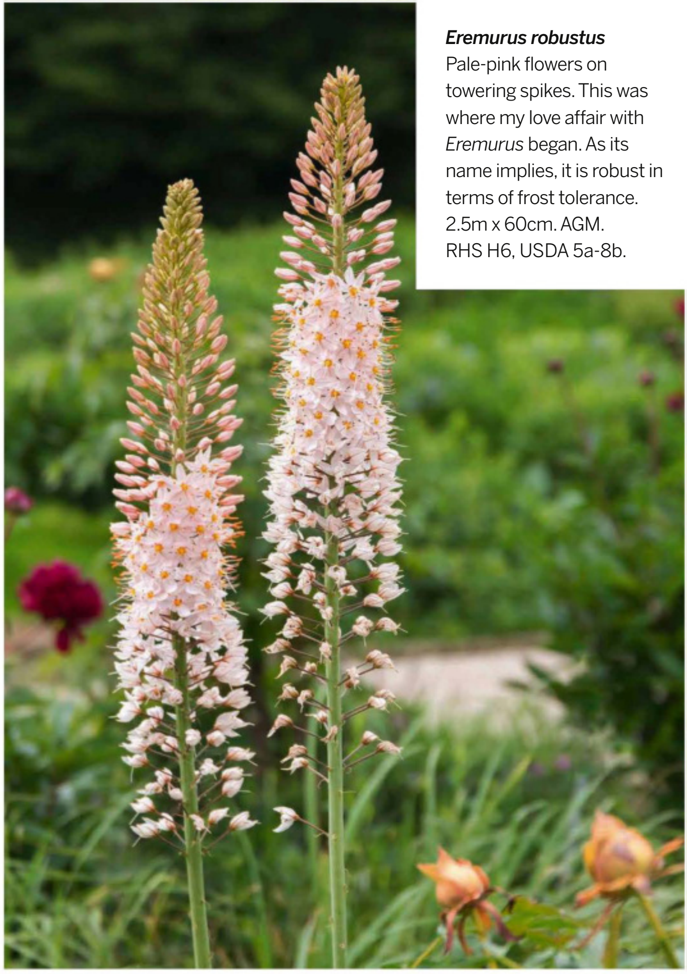
JASON INGRAM; GAP PHOTOS; RM FLORAL / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO.



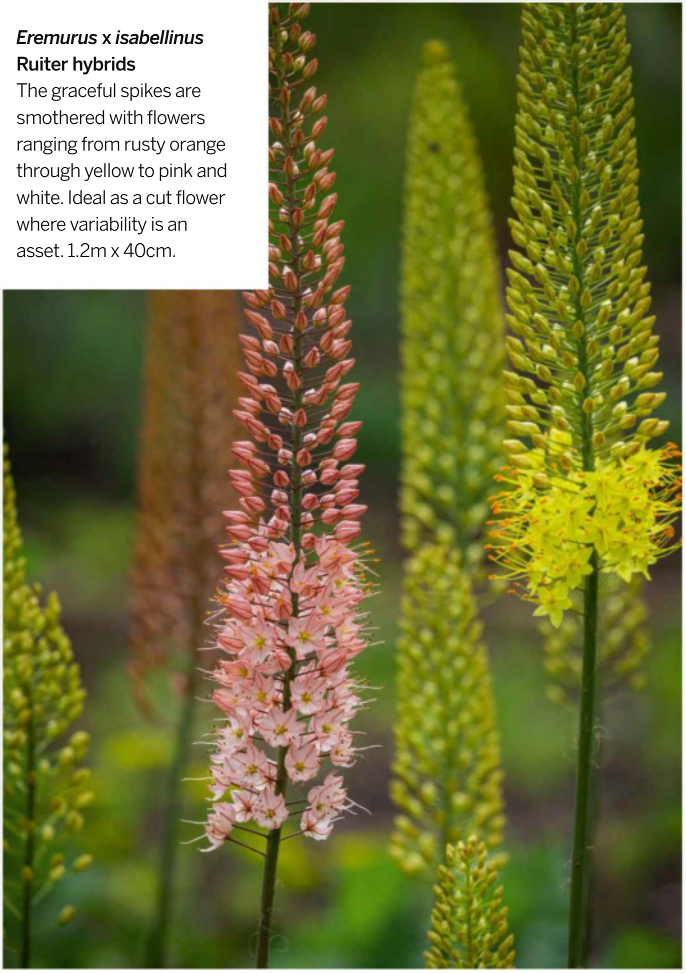
Eremurus stenophyllus
The narrow-leaved foxtail lily is a compact choice with narrow leaves and bright-yellow flowers that darken as they age.
1m x 60cm. AGM.
RHS H6, USDA 5a-8b.



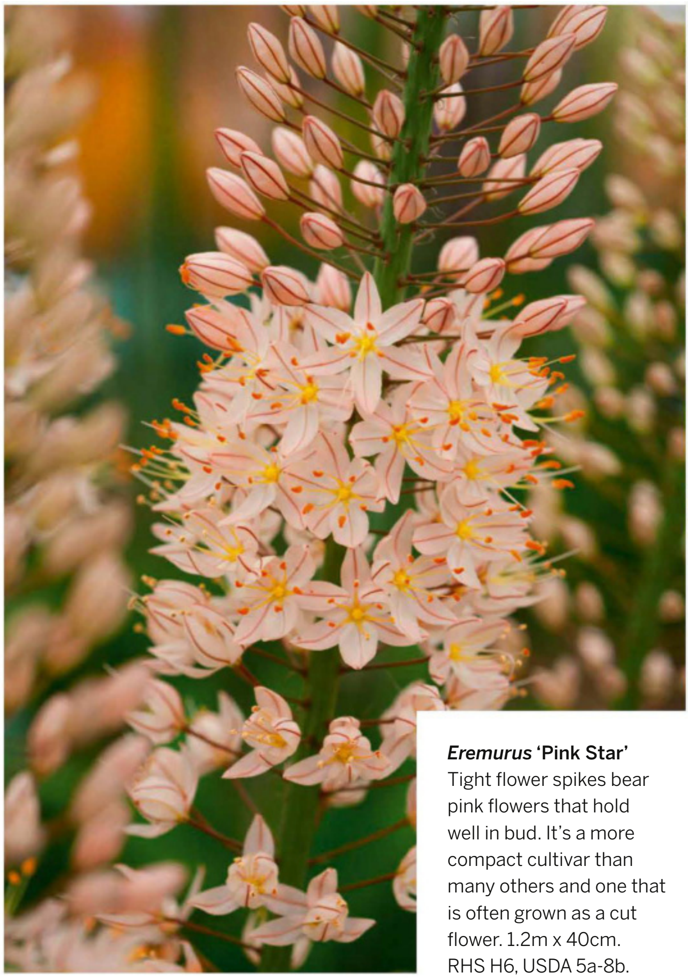
***Eremurus* 'White Beauty Favourite'**
Flower spikes hold white flowers with yellow centres and stamens, They appear creamy yellow in bud.
1.2m x 50cm. RHS H6, USDA 5a-8b.



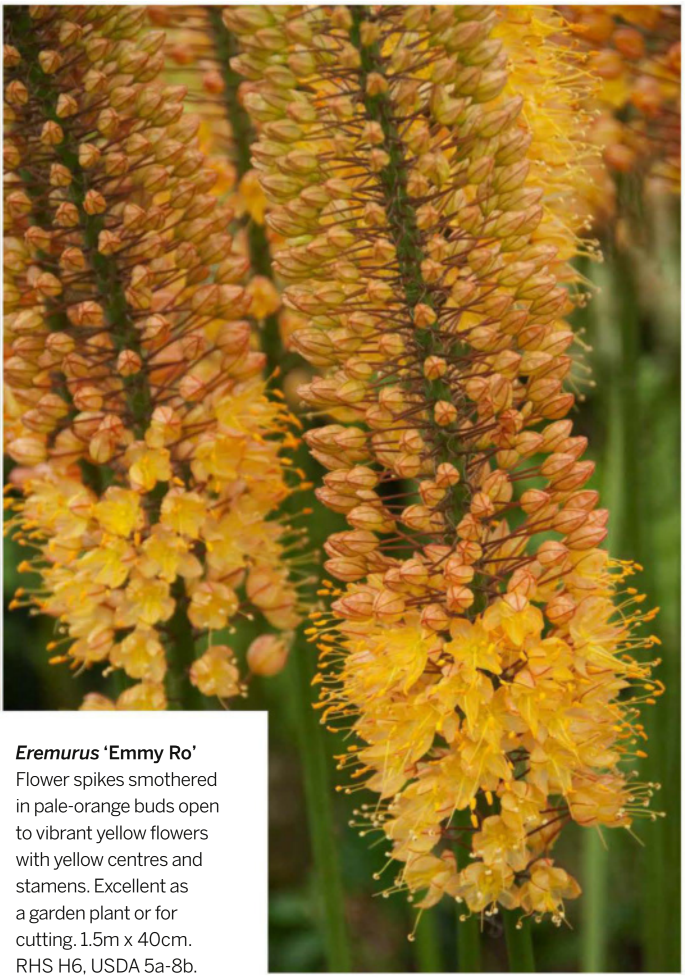
Eremurus robustus
Pale-pink flowers on towering spikes. This was where my love affair with *Eremurus* began. As its name implies, it is robust in terms of frost tolerance.
2.5m x 60cm. AGM.
RHS H6, USDA 5a-8b.



***Eremurus* x *isabellinus* Ruiter hybrids**
The graceful spikes are smothered with flowers ranging from rusty orange through yellow to pink and white. Ideal as a cut flower where variability is an asset. 1.2m x 40cm.



***Eremurus* 'Pink Star'**
Tight flower spikes bear pink flowers that hold well in bud. It's a more compact cultivar than many others and one that is often grown as a cut flower. 1.2m x 40cm. RHS H6, USDA 5a-8b.



***Eremurus* 'Emmy Ro'**
Flower spikes smothered in pale-orange buds open to vibrant yellow flowers with yellow centres and stamens. Excellent as a garden plant or for cutting. 1.5m x 40cm. RHS H6, USDA 5a-8b.

▷ Thankfully, as these are tall plants their absence is usually obscured by foreground planting.

> These are plants that, provided they are given the right growing conditions, go with anything

And it is as vertical accent plants that *Eremurus* excel – although it doesn't always follow that this has to be in the middle or rear of a planting. In a gravel garden they can look spectacular as a foreground plant, accompanied by a nice chunky boulder and some thoughtfully positioned gravel.

In this gravel garden scenario, they look well with self-seeding colonisers, such as *Eschscholzia californica* and *Nigella damascena*, which do a good job of filling in around the base of the plant without shading the crown. Silver-leaved lavenders, *Santolina* and *Helichrysum* are perfect companions, as is the statuesque *Salvia candelabrum* that produces lavender-blue flowers on very long, wand-like stems. If you don't have a gravel garden, the foot of a sunny wall will do nicely.

In a more conventional border, the post-flowering absence of *Eremurus* means it is advisable to take a more conservative approach and plant in the middle to back of the bed. A degree of care is required to reduce the amount of shading to the crown – nothing more complicated than keeping a watchful eye and a sharp pair of secateurs to trim back the foliage of adjoining plants if required.

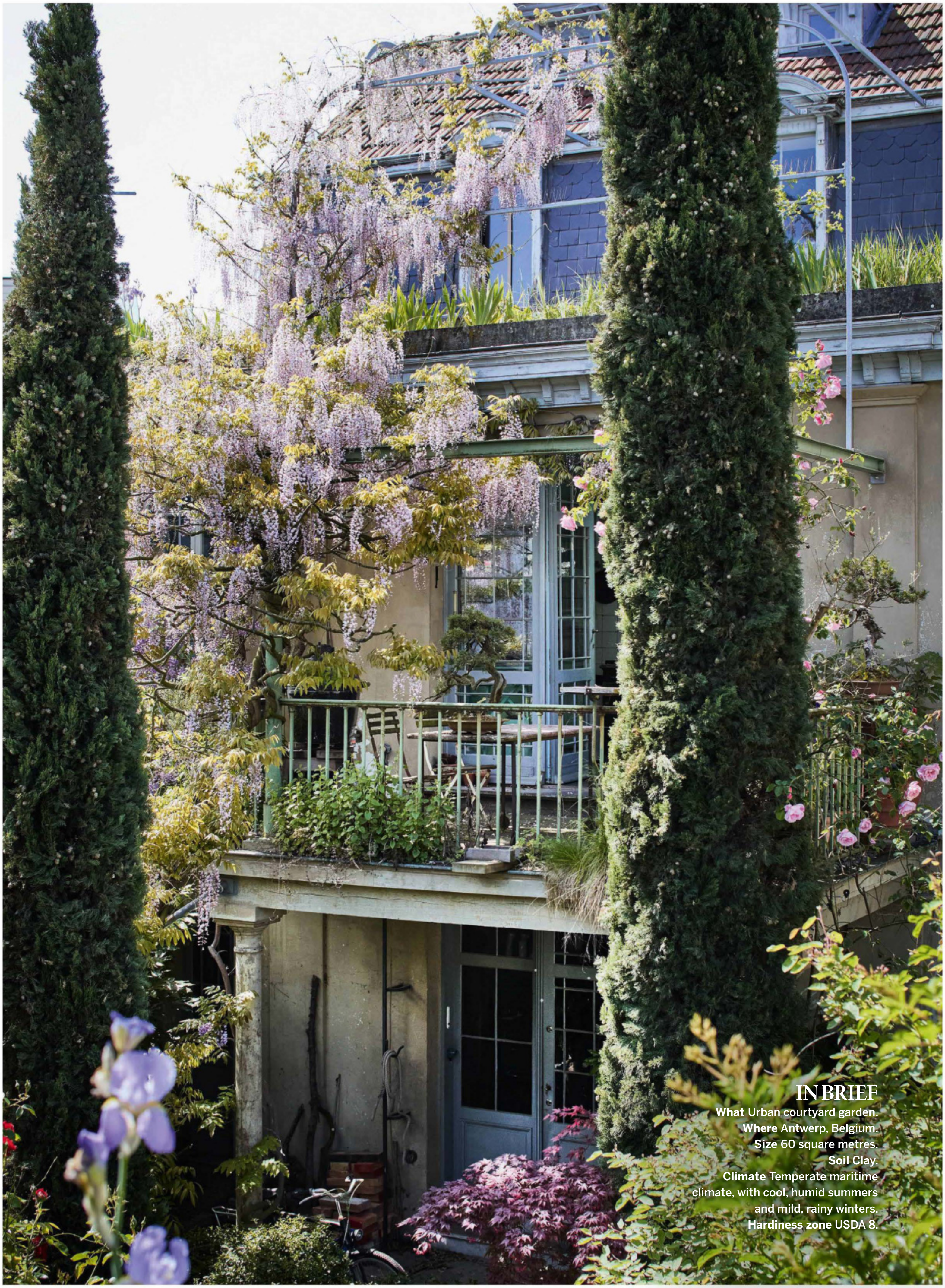
As a component plant in a sunny border I would still combine *Eremurus* with plants that have that hot, sunny Mediterranean feel to them. The tall, airy inflorescences of *Stipa gigantea* are a perfect companion, to which I would add *Rosa glauca* with its pewter-grey foliage and attractive autumn hips, and the statuesque cardoon, *Cynara cardunculus*. To the front, silver-leaved *Artemesia arborscens* and *Salvia* 'Nachtvlinder' would complete the picture. *Eremurus* also excel as cut flowers, where it is arguably easier to manage some of the cultivation foibles.

But to return to that west-facing border at RHS Hyde Hall, where the *Eremurus robustus* not only thrived in a bed of roses but provided a seasonal showstopper, perhaps these are plants that, provided they are given the right growing conditions, go with anything. ❑

Matthew Wilson is an award-winning garden and landscape designer, writer, broadcaster and lecturer.

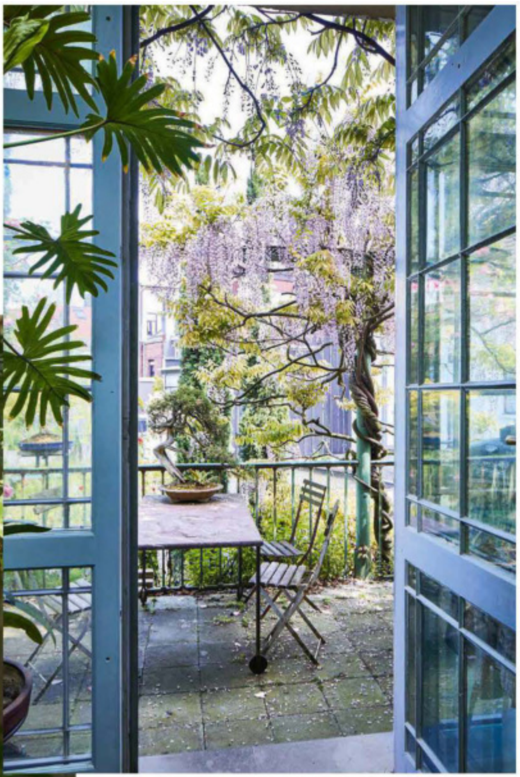
Where to buy and see
- **Beth Chatto Plants & Gardens** Elmstead Market, Colchester, Essex CO7 7DB. Tel 01206 822007, bethchatto.co.uk
- **Burncoose Nurseries** Gwennap, Redruth, Cornwall TR16 6BJ. Tel 01209 860316, burncoose.co.uk
- **RHS Garden Hyde Hall** Chelmsford, Essex CM3 8ET. Tel 01245 400256, rhs.org.uk

VISIONS / GAP PHOTOS; MARK BOLTON / GAP PHOTOS; BLICKWINKEL / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO; JONATHAN BUCKLEY / GAP PHOTOS; DORLING KINDERSLEY LTD / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO; MICHAEL HOWES / GAP PHOTOS - RHS HAMPTON COURT PALACE FLOWER SHOW 2011.JACQUES ARMAND INTERNATIONAL



IN BRIEF

What Urban courtyard garden.
Where Antwerp, Belgium.
Size 60 square metres.
Soil Clay.
Climate Temperate maritime climate, with cool, humid summers and mild, rainy winters.
Hardiness zone USDA 8.



Facing page Tall cypresses (*Cupressus sempervirens* Stricta Group) add height to the garden and frame the view. *Wisteria floribunda* f. *rosea* 'Hon-beni' scrambles from the courtyard to the upper terrace that leads out from the kitchen and on up over the pergola on the roof above. It is complemented by *Rosa* 'Madame Grégoire Staechelin'. On the roof above, the long trough is planted with two types of lilac-coloured *Iris germanica*, the cultivar names of which have been lost, interlaced with self-seeded grasses and a wild rose.

Above left *Wisteria* x *valderi* 'Murasaki-kapitan' clambers up the pillar beneath the kitchen terrace.

Above centre Antoine Vandewoude in his garden.

Above right *Wisteria floribunda* f. *rosea* 'Hon-beni' screens the kitchen terrace from the neighbours. A bonsai *Juniperus chinensis* graces the terrace table, while a *Philodendron bipinnatifidum* adds impact in the kitchen.

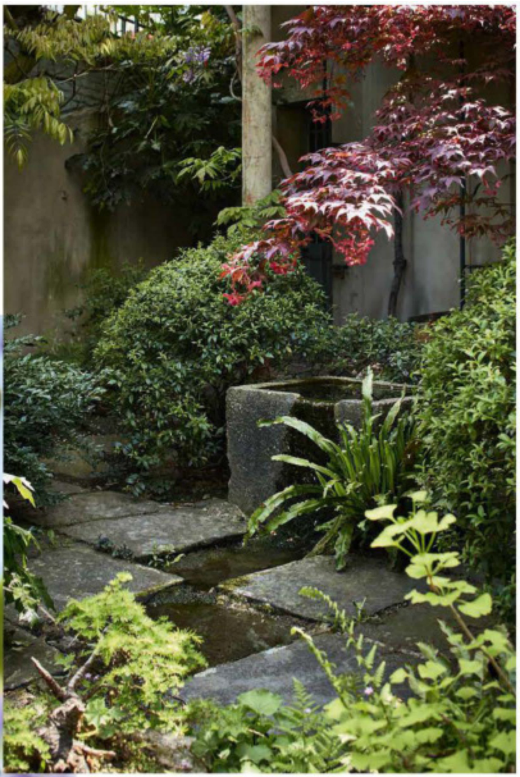
URBAN OASIS

Plants are an integral, all-encompassing part of this small, stacked live/work space in the city of Antwerp

WORDS VERONICA PEERLESS PHOTOGRAPHS SABRINA ROTHE

Enter through a bright-red door on an Antwerp street corner, and you pass through a passageway before encountering an enclosed courtyard garden that is an unexpected riot of cascading wisteria, climbing roses, tall cypresses and irises, with water tinkling in the background. "Some visitors say it's like the South of France, while one journalist described it as 'Little Italy,'" says its creator, Antoine Vandewoude. It could equally be said that the bonsai, ferns and acers give the space a Japanese feel. Not that Antoine cares much for labels. He is a self-taught carpenter, designer and maker who creates everything from furniture to entire interiors for his clients, including the Belgian fashion designer Dries van Noten. He has also recently discovered a talent for ceramics. Antoine is a self-taught gardener, too, and applies that same artistry and intuition to his outside space as he does to his interiors.

The garden is part of the live/work property that Antoine shares with his wife and two adult sons. Having searched for seven years for a property with outside space, they eventually found this rundown former sweet factory with a concrete-filled courtyard in ▷



Left Ferns, including hart's tongue fern (*Asplenium scolopendrium*) and others already in the garden, plus a hardy geranium, thrive in a shady corner.

Centre *Wisteria* x *valderi* 'Murasaki-kapitan', with its pale blue-purple flowers that appear from a relatively young age.

Above Antoine built the water feature, which emerges from a cube near his office and meanders to a small pond. It was inspired by a picture he saw of a mountainside in Italy with water running next to a path.

Facing page Antoine built the kitchen terrace (on pillars). His office is downstairs. A bonsai *Acer palmatum* 'Garnet' and *Acer palmatum*, plus bonsai *Larix decidua*, *Pinus parviflora*, *Ulmus parvifolia* and *Ginkgo biloba*, give a Japanese feel, while *Osmanthus* x *burkwoodii* provides strong evergreen structure.

▷ the late 1990s. The property had such an unusual layout that they almost didn't view it, but in the end they could see its potential.

Antoine spent a further seven years renovating the property before the family moved in. The living space is now on the first and second floors of the main building, above an office and storage area; the plant-filled kitchen flows out on to a terrace on pillars constructed by Antoine. Across the courtyard is Antoine's workshop, with his ceramics studio above it. This leads out on to a verdant and unusual green roof, topped with a pergola.

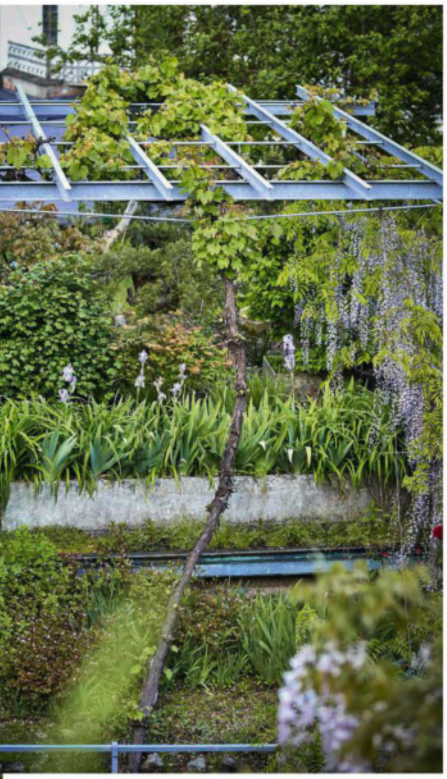
Antoine quickly realised that the central courtyard was in danger of becoming a dumping ground from the renovations, so resolved to create a garden while he was working on the living space. Much like the interiors that Antoine works on, it has evolved over time. "Old houses were not done in a day. The ones we like the most have a certain spirit, because they have a layer of time on them." He did not draw up a plan for the courtyard: "Often designers make paths and no one walks on them. I wanted to make sure the paths would be where it's natural to walk." He also did not initially know much about plants. "I decided on the form of a plant I needed, then researched which plants had that form and would grow in my space."

Initially, Antoine had a path going from the house directly to his workshop opposite, with the rest of the area laid to lawn. He soon realised that this was not the solution. "Most gardens have grass in the middle and plants on the side. But it's not interesting, because you see everything all at once. It's not mysterious." He removed the grass and replaced it with stone paving, adding more planting, a meandering path and water.

The water emerges from a stone cube near his office and is then gently pumped over stones before filtering through a small pond. "It was a lot of work, but it wasn't complicated." The feature was inspired by a picture he saw at a client's house, of a mountainside in Italy where water was running next to a path. "That's how it often works with me – I see something and think I can do something with the idea."

The small space feels infinitely more generous and intriguing as it is taken upwards wherever possible. The cypresses give height but were actually chosen to frame the view ▷

The small space feels infinitely more generous and intriguing as it is taken upwards wherever possible



Facing page The view across from the house to the workshop and its green roof. Topped by a pergola, it gives the impression of a hanging garden, and is more for viewing from the house opposite than walking on. Here, bearded irises grow in planters and three wisterias (*Wisteria floribunda* f. *multijuga* 'Kyushaku', *W. sinensis* 'Prolific' and *W.* x *valderi* 'Murasaki-kapitan') grow in pots. Rooted in the ground below, *Rosa* 'Compassion' and *W. floribunda* f. *multijuga* climb towards the sky, along with a grapevine.

Above left Several potted lilac *Iris germanica* mingle with wisteria behind to beautiful effect.

Above centre *Pinus parviflora* is one of seven bonsai trees cared for by Antoine.

Above right The green roof above Antoine's workshop. Its base comprises a 5-10cm-deep layer of lightweight volcanic rock granules.

▷ from the first-floor living space. "If I'm in the kitchen, I can't see the garden below, but I can see the cypresses, and they frame the view of the green roof opposite." This green roof, complete with a pergola that is smothered in climbers and a grapevine, gives the impression of a hanging garden.

Towering wisterias play a key role. There are three in the main courtyard, including a vigorous, pink-tinted *Wisteria floribunda* f. *rosea* 'Hon-beni', which clambers up and over the pergola on the kitchen terrace and the pergola on the roof above it, and *Wisteria floribunda* f. *multijuga* 'Kyushaku', which has very long flowers and clothes the workshop. There are more wisterias in pots on the green roof. "Growing wisteria in a pot is not ideal," he admits. "They need a large container and ericaceous compost and feed. I also regularly prune the roots. It is best to place the pot in the shade and the plant in the sun." After the wisterias come the roses. Antoine originally planted 36, but only a handful remain. "There was a certain amount of spraying, but in the end I just kept the plants that were really healthy. Some were just too fragile, so I gave them away."

Irises also feature strongly. In addition to *Iris ensata* in the courtyard pond, three 2.5m-long window boxes on the roof of the kitchen contain *I. germanica* (the cultivar names long since forgotten), mixed with self-seeded grasses and a wild rose, giving a naturalistic look. There are more irises in planters on the green roof. "Irises are ideal for pots as their tubers store food and water," says Antoine. "They tolerate drought and grow in any well-drained soil."

Seven bonsai – a pine, three junipers, laurels, an elm and a ginkgo – are another notable feature. Despite their delicate appearance, these are hardy trees, so stay outside in all but the coldest weather. Antoine has not done much to them for three years, and his work in the garden is now mostly confined to pruning, especially the wisterias and roses. He is toying with the idea of adding camellias here and there for interest earlier in the spring and never accepts plants from friends, as they won't fit in with his aesthetic. But however the garden evolves, he will develop it with the same immense creativity that he applies to everything that he does. ☐

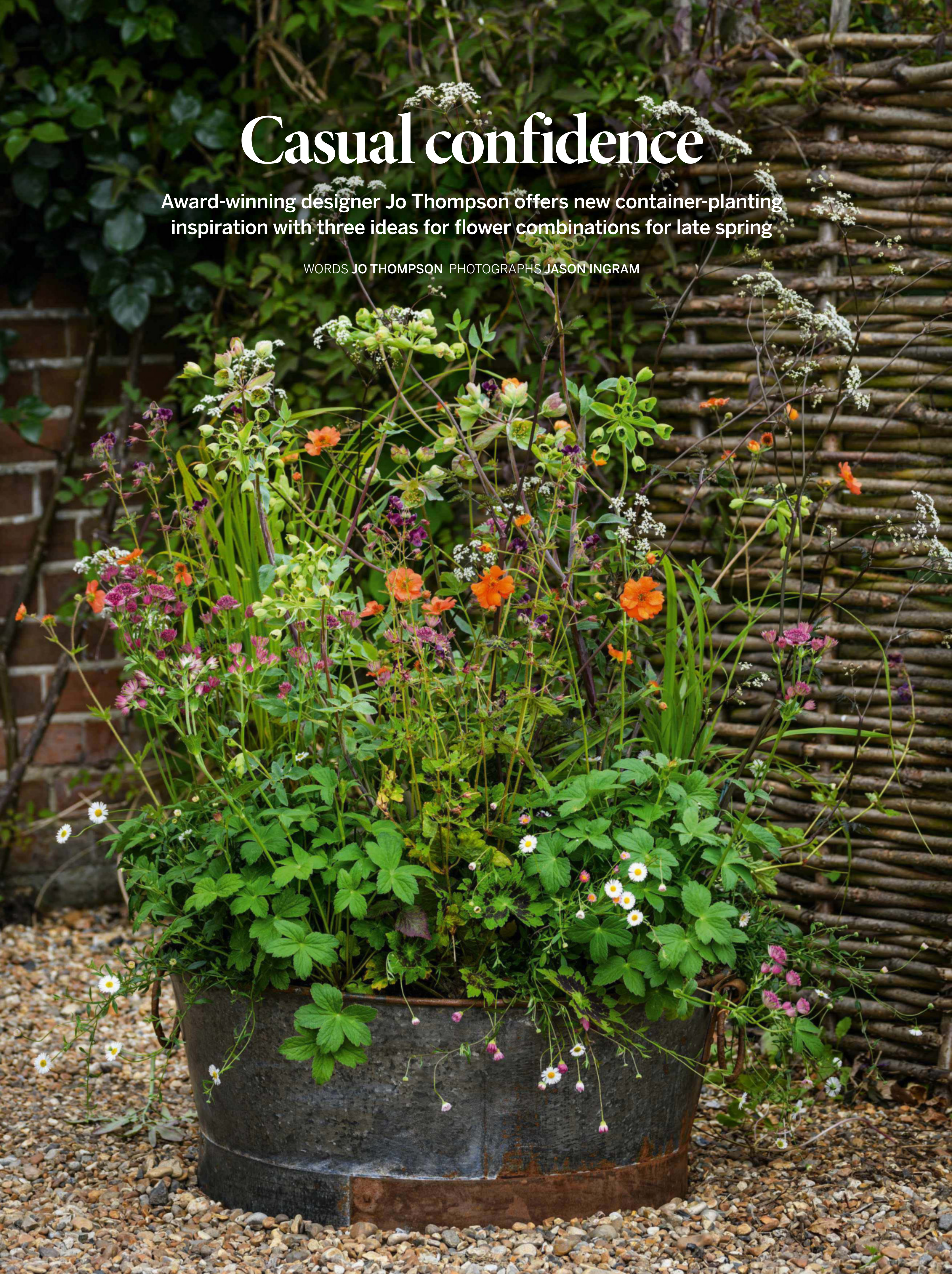
USEFUL INFORMATION

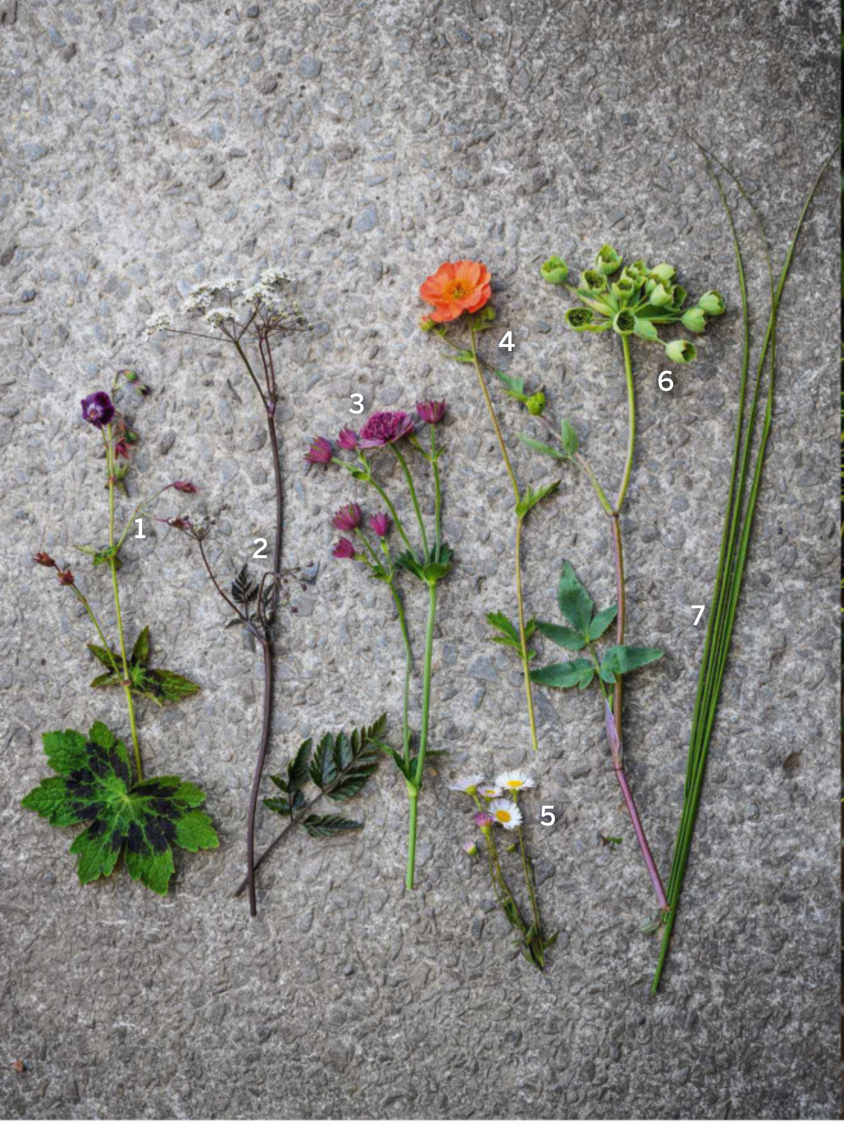
Find out more about Antoine Vandewoude's work at **antoinevandewoude.com**

Casual confidence

Award-winning designer Jo Thompson offers new container-planting inspiration with three ideas for flower combinations for late spring

WORDS **JO THOMPSON** PHOTOGRAPHS **JASON INGRAM**





POLLINATOR'S PARADISE

I can't get enough of the plants in this container, proved by the fact that this is a collection I first put together for my very first RHS Chelsea Flower Show garden, 15 years ago, and which I keep coming back to when I want to bring a bit of relaxed cheer to the early summer garden. It's a grouping that is guaranteed to bring in the pollinators, as the variety of flowerheads creates a buffet for a number of insects.

How to achieve the look

Container and composition
This container has been slowly rusting over the years in a corner of my cottage garden, and each year it comes into its own as I plant it up in the brightest of colours, picking out shades with hints of orange and red to make the most of its rusty tones.

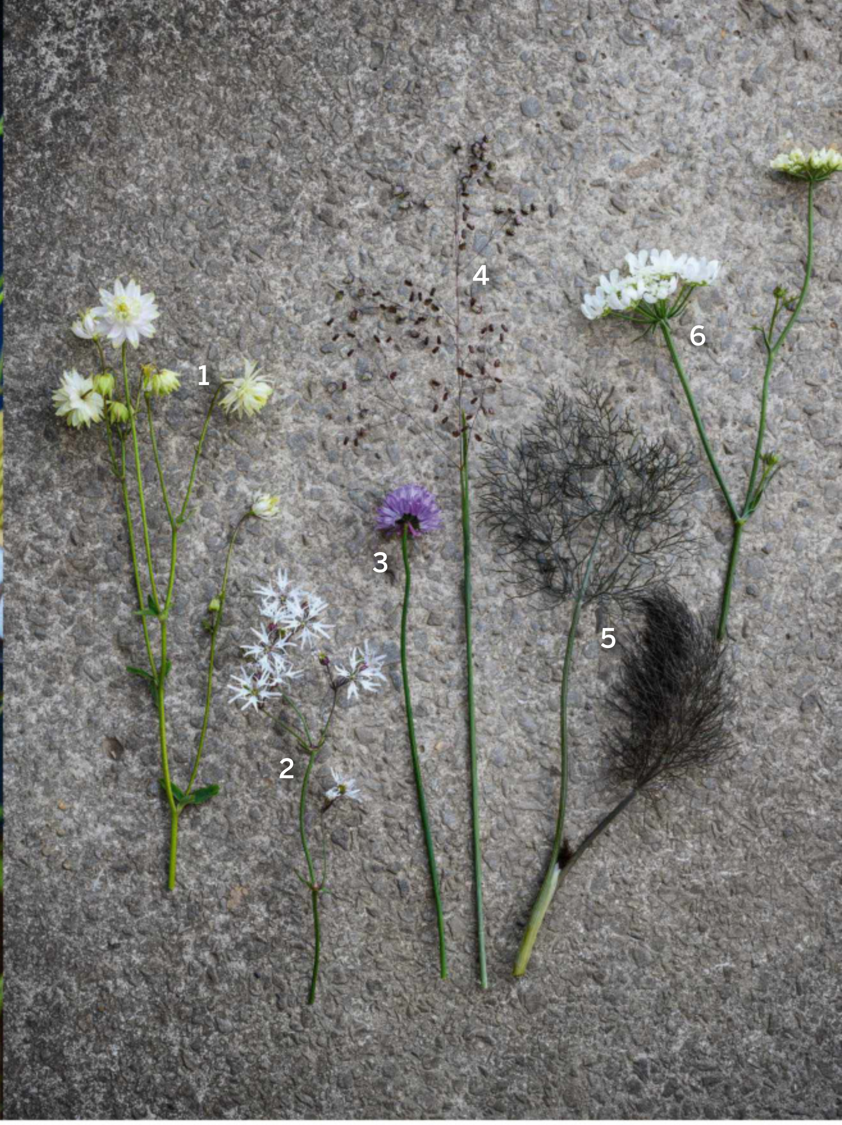
I wanted to create that laid-back look that comes from a careful choice of plant forms. You've got the grassy element from the calamagrostis, while the geraniums' leaves provide that all-important foliage that softens the top of the metal planter.

As soon as you put these plants together, they start working into and around each other. There's a bit of teamwork between the mathiasella and the black stems of the ornamental cow parsley as they move and twist to accommodate each other. Around this structure, the vivid orange of the geum sits perfectly with the dusky maroon of the geranium; a colour palette inspired by the shades of an early sunrise. The erigeron's daisy heads try to make a break for freedom at the foot of the display. Their white petals subtly pick up the colour of the anthriscus flowers and are indispensable in bringing highlights to the planting.

Cultivation and care
The longer these plants have time together, the better they look. The mathiasella doesn't like to get soggy in winter, but is very happy in a pot. Leave its bracts on, as they fade to a beautiful yet subtle dusky pink that gives colour through to the autumn.

Plants

1 ***Geranium phaeum*** **'Samobor'** Scalloped leaves and dusky flowers. May – June. Height and spread: 80cm x 45cm. RHS H7, USDA 5a-7b†.
2 ***Anthriscus sylvestris*** **'Ravenswing'** Self-seeding, ornamental cow parsley with black filigree foliage. May – July. 1m x 30cm. RHS H6.
3 ***Astrantia*** **'Roma'** Soft pink bracts create a star-like shape. June – September. 60cm x 40cm. AGM*. RHS H7, USDA 4a-7b.
4 ***Geum*** **'Prinses Juliana'** Delicate bright-orange flowers. 50cm x 60cm. RHS H7.
5 ***Erigeron karvinskianus*** Daisy-like flowers. Will happily self-seed. April – October. 30cm x 1m. AGM. RHS H5, USDA 6a-9b.
6 ***Mathiasella bupleuroides*** **'Green Dream'** Umbels made up of bracts encasing small black flowers. May – September. 1m x 80cm. RHS H5.
7 ***Calamagrostis brachytricha*** Grass with fresh green leaves and feathery flower plumes. 1.5m x 90cm. AGM. RHS H6, USDA 4a-9b.



INTERESTING EDIBLES

Let's not overlook pretty edible plants when planting up pots. Some, such as chives, *Allium schoenoprasum*, and fennel, *Foeniculum vulgare* 'Purpureum', are ready to harvest from late spring and early summer and look pretty when nestled into a tapestry of lacy, textural foliage, providing a harmonious colour palette and a contrast of flower shapes. This planting is designed to be just as at home as an ornamental display as it would be sitting near a kitchen door for snipping.

How to achieve the look

Container and composition

It's wonderful when the garden starts to become truly productive, and how satisfying it is to be able to harness a little of this bounty in an old pot near the house, where you can appreciate the textural harmonies and the delicate colours of late spring.

Using an old zinc trough with handles, which make it easy to move around, I've chosen two edible plants that are as good in appearance as they are in taste. The fennel's filigree foliage provides the perfect backdrop to the chives' purple drumheads; these are accompanied by the equally attractive foliage of the white ragged robin and the orlaya. These white flowers partner well with pretty aquilegia flowers, their heads bending down towards the quivering quaking grass, which brings the tiniest sensation of movement to this planting. As they grow in and around each other in this simplest and most unassuming of arrangements, there's a feeling of a self-seeded patch of wildflowers and grasses that have found themselves casually growing together in a garden corner.

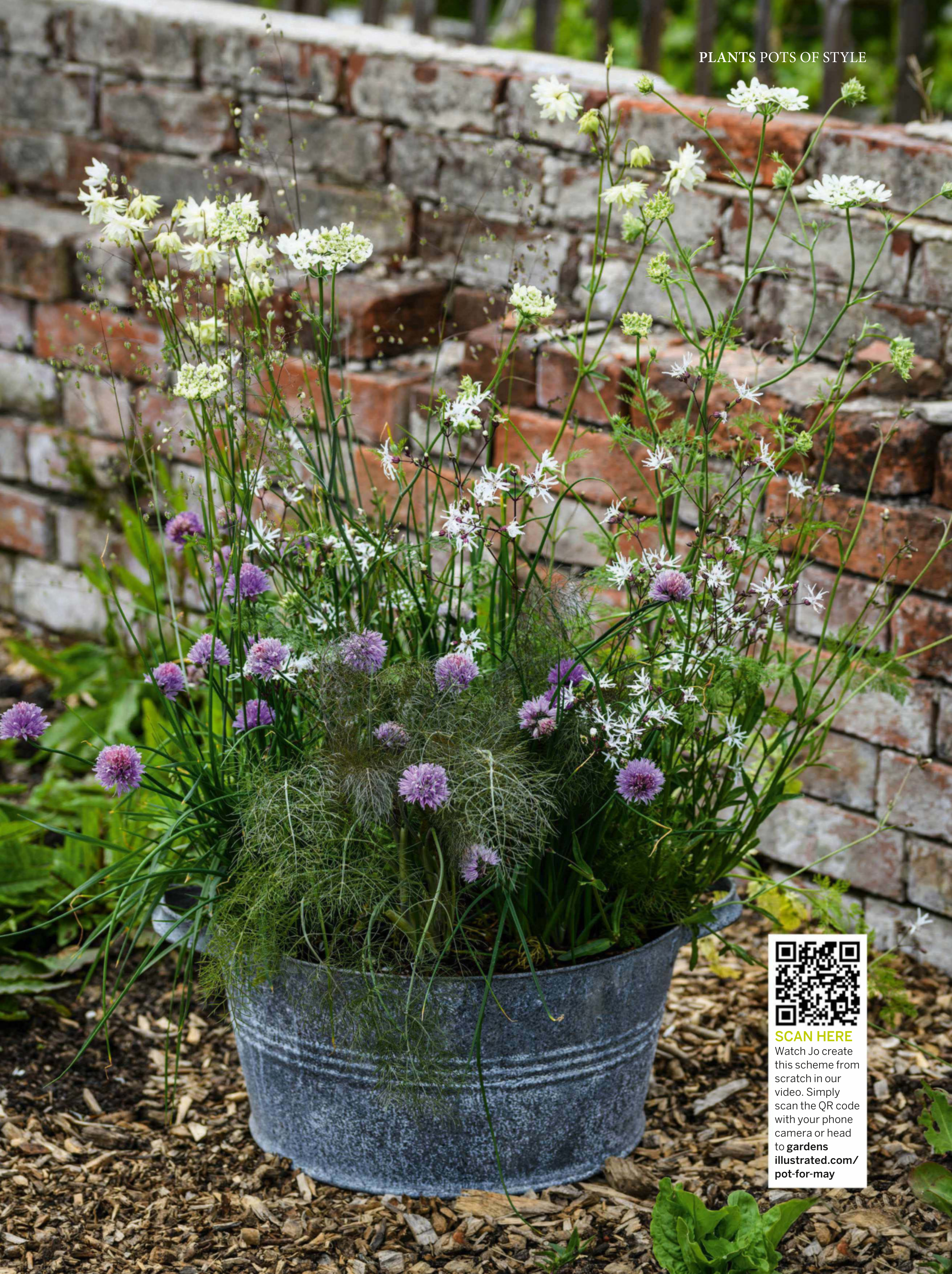
When planting, ensure you have enough 'naked stems' of the briza and aquilegia to contrast with the fluff of the fennel.

Cultivation and care

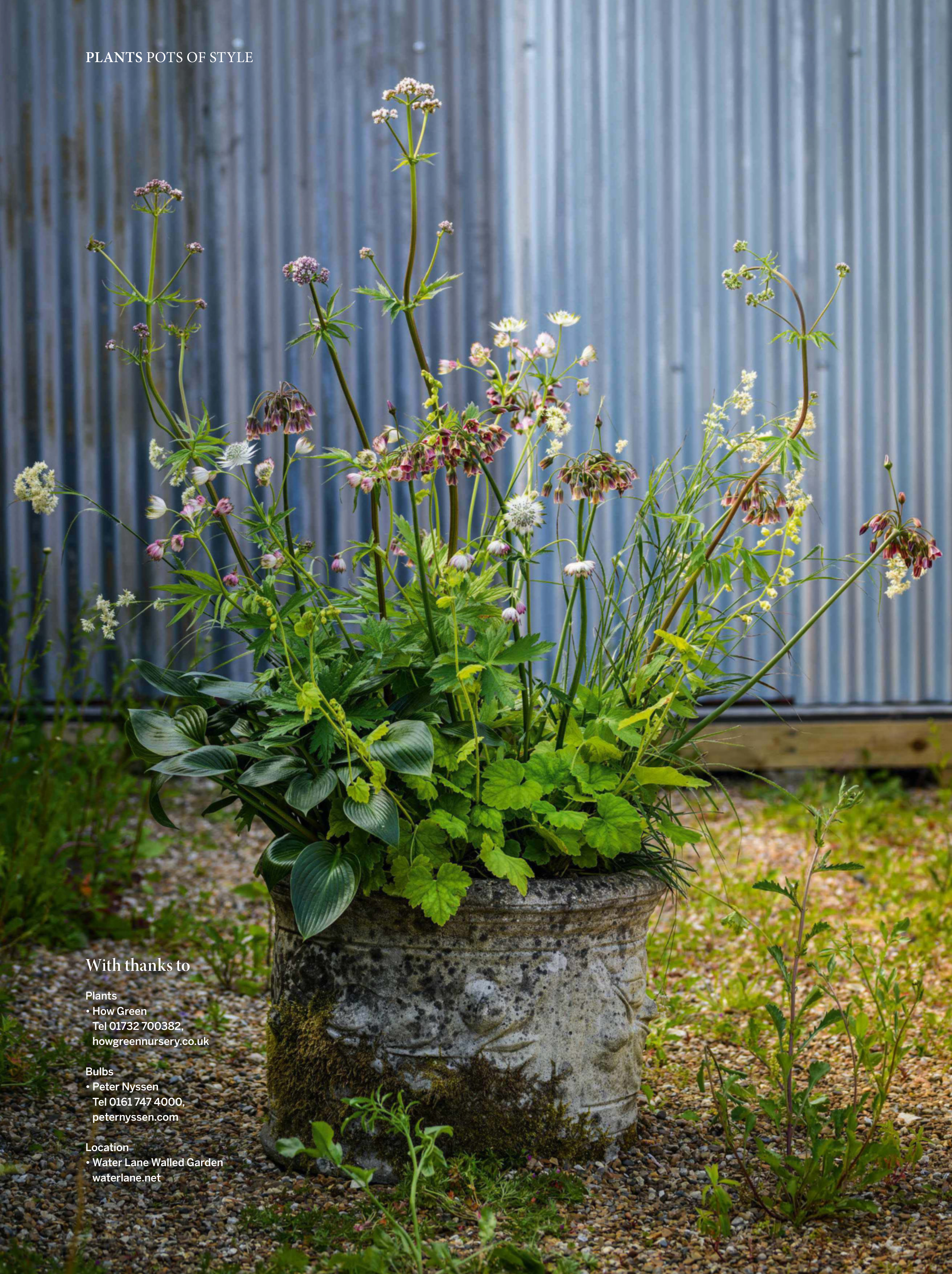
Keep an eye on this one to make sure that it doesn't dry out completely, but generally this is the easiest of pots to care for. Keep snipping the chive flowers to produce new leaves. You may even get some of these plants self-seeding nearby.

Plants

1 ***Aquilegia vulgaris* 'Nivea'** Upright stems bearing dainty bell-like flowers with tiny spurs behind. May – June. 80cm x 50cm. RHS H7.
2 ***Silene flos-cuculi* 'White Robin'** Ragged robin with star-shaped white flowers. June – August. 70cm x 80cm. RHS H7, USDA 5a-8b.
3 ***Allium schoenoprasum*** The leaves and the flowers of chives are edible. May/June – August. 30cm x 5cm. RHS H6, USDA 4a-8b.
4 ***Briza media* 'Limouzi'** Semi-evergreen grass, known as quaking grass as its light brown flowers make the stems appear to tremble. May – September. 60cm x 50cm. RHS H7.
5 ***Foeniculum vulgare* 'Purpureum'** Fennel's finely divided aromatic foliage is edible along with the flowers and seeds. May – October. 1.8m x 1m. RHS H5, USDA 4a-9b.
6 ***Orlaya grandiflora*** A branching hardy annual with lacy foliage and bright white umbels. June – October. 60cm x 30cm. AGM. RHS H7.



SCAN HERE
Watch Jo create this scheme from scratch in our video. Simply scan the QR code with your phone camera or head to **gardens illustrated.com/ pot-for-may**

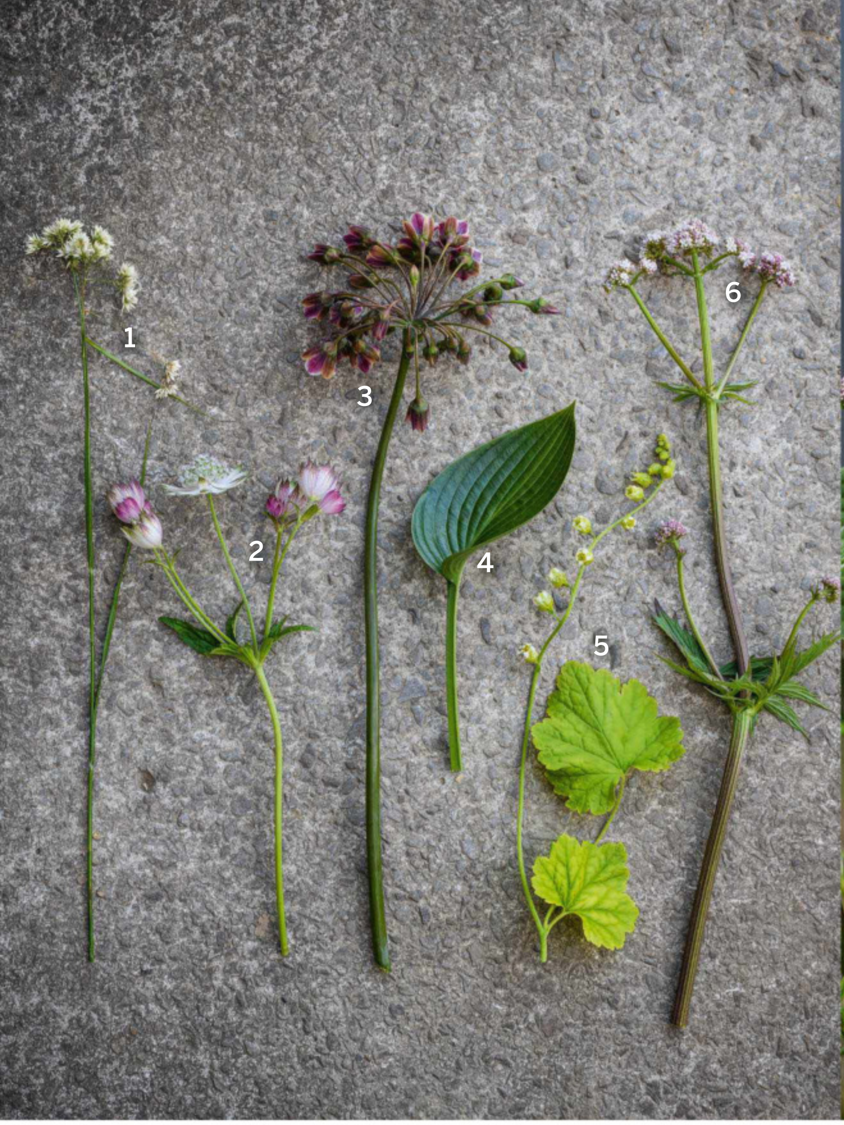


With thanks to

Plants
- How Green
  Tel 01732 700382,
  howgreennursery.co.uk

Bulbs
- Peter Nyssen
  Tel 0161 747 4000,
  peternyssen.com

Location
- Water Lane Walled Garden
  waterlane.net



SHADY ELEGANCE

A dull corner is brightened up by a mix of foliage plants and tall stems, which twist and turn as they grow, creating an elegant and delicate look. Here, a stone pot, which is too heavy to be moved from its partially shaded spot, is decorated for the summer in shades of mid to dark green, and subtle flower colours of creamy whites and the palest of pinky purples. Architectural stems create structure and movement.

How to achieve the look

Container and composition

You may have that beautiful container in the garden: that pot which is in an out-of-the-way location. You'd love to plant it up, but it's just too heavy to move to a better spot where it could be admired in all its beauty instead of being forgotten and ignored.

This is one of those pots. It was discarded by an old shed, so beautiful and yet neglected. But filled with plants which don't mind the lack of sunlight, it's transformed into something simple and elegant.

The hosta and tellima were chosen to work together for their different greens, but also for their contrasts in leaf form. These create a sturdy foundation on which to balance the tall stems of the valerian and alliums, which work their way up and out of the foliage and catch glimpses of light in this partially shaded corner.

You'll have to have plant the allium bulbs – Sicilian honey garlic – the preceding autumn. Their sinuous shape adds to the natural, relaxed feel of this collection, which provides interest right though to autumn, as the seedheads create extended visual value.

Cultivation and care

This container is happy in part shade, and easy to maintain, just give it enough water to ensure the peat-free compost doesn't dry out. Leave the allium seedheads on after the flowers fade as they'll create extraordinary shuttlecock shapes, which look as good in dried flower arrangements as they do in the pot.

Plants

1 ***Luzula nivea*** A slow-spreading perennial with hairy dark-green foliage and clusters of white-ish flowers that dangle from the stems. June – July. 60cm x 45cm. RHS H5.
2 ***Astrantia* 'Buckland'** A clump-forming perennial with pale-pink flowers held by ruffs of silvery-white bracts. June – August. 90cm x 30cm. AGM. RHS H7, USDA 4a-7b.
3 ***Allium siculum*** Sicilian honey garlic produces an umbel of flowers in shades of cream, pink and pale purple. May – June. 1.2m x 10cm. RHS H5.
4 ***Hosta* 'Devon Green'** Attractive dark-green leaves that are shiny and heart-shaped. May – September. 50cm x 50cm. AGM. RHS H7.
5 ***Tellima grandiflora*** A compact perennial with hairy, scalloped mid-green leaves and racemes. 80cm x 30cm. RHS H6.
6 ***Valeriana officinalis*** Dome-shaped clusters of scented pink-white flowers and finely divided leaves. June – August. 1.5m x 45cm. RHS H4.

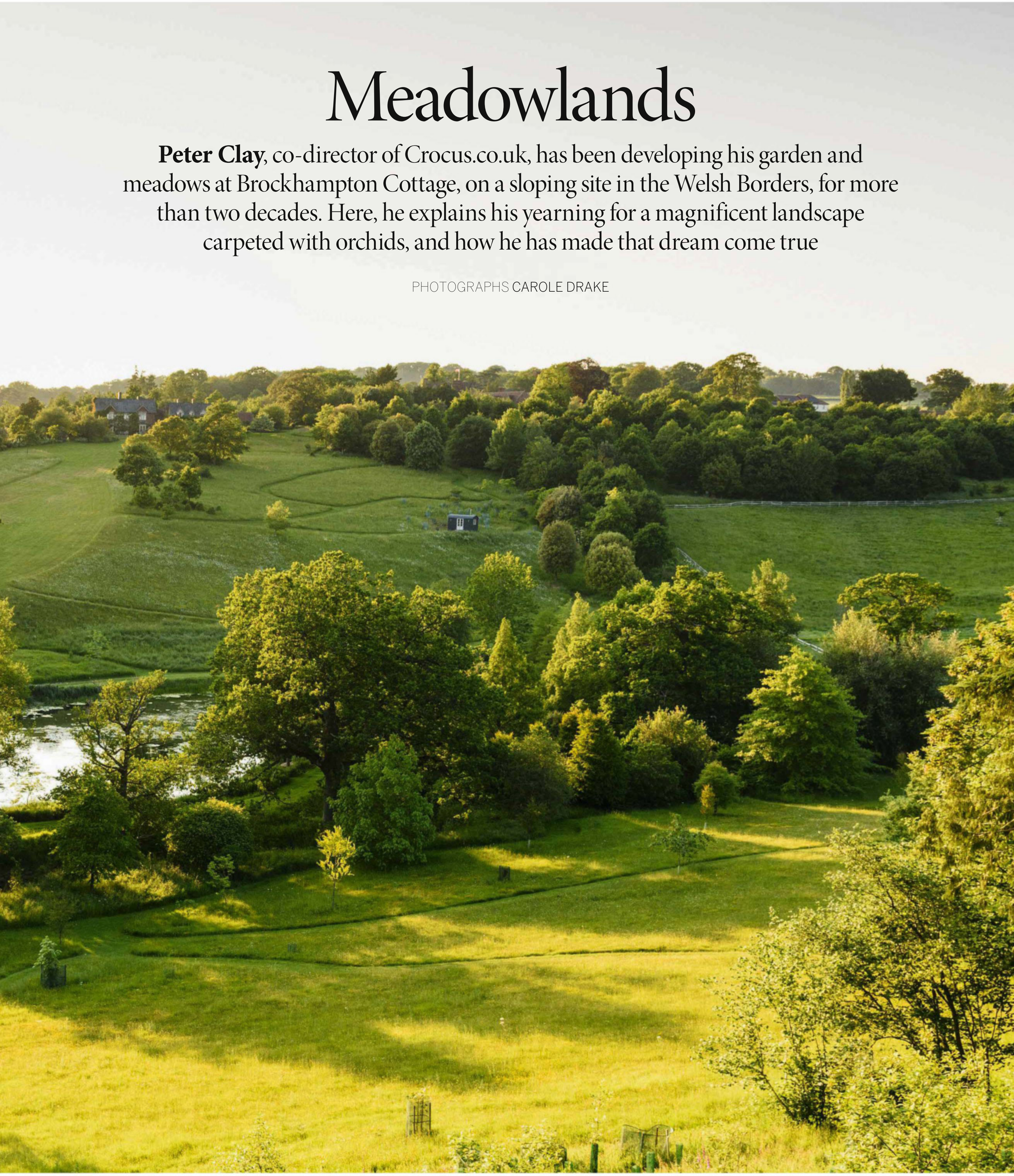
*Holds an Award of Garden Merit from the Royal Horticultural Society. Hardiness ratings given where available.

The distant house commands views over the deep Herefordshire valley of meadow, woodland and water, shaped by generations of farmers and landowners. All appear part of the same landscape, but it wasn't always this way. Peter worked with digger drivers (taking a detour from their work on the M50) to reshape contours, moving half a hillside to gently slope the land down to the lake, opening new sight lines between house and water.

Meadowlands

Peter Clay, co-director of Crocus.co.uk, has been developing his garden and meadows at Brockhampton Cottage, on a sloping site in the Welsh Borders, for more than two decades. Here, he explains his yearning for a magnificent landscape carpeted with orchids, and how he has made that dream come true

PHOTOGRAPHS CAROLE DRAKE



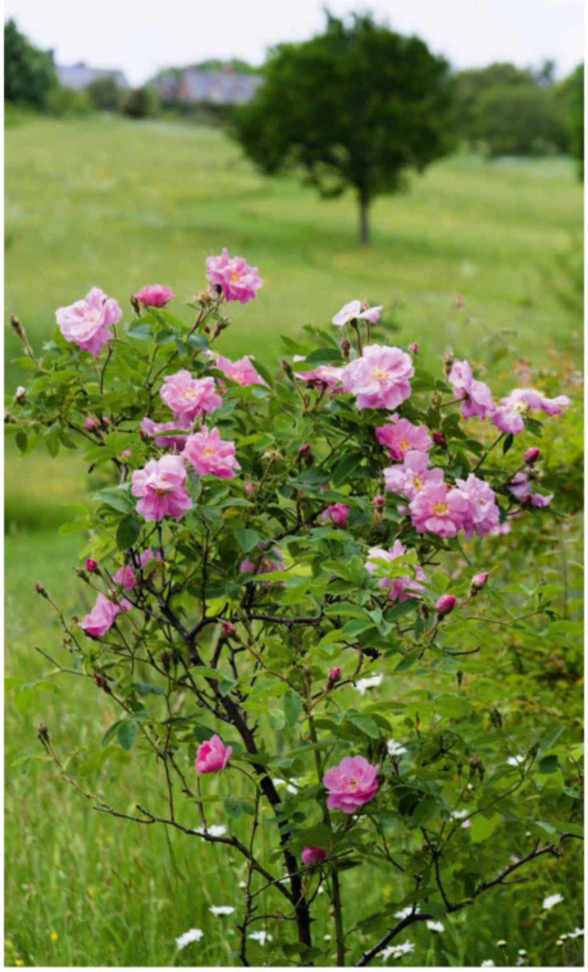
The meadow would be my children's magic carpet: the chance to run wild down grassy corridors, chasing butterflies and the sun

It was my grandfather who dreamed of creating a lake in the valley below the house. He was a prisoner of war, and it was the vision of the lake that kept him sane during his years of captivity. In 1946, he made it a reality. When he died, the first thing I did was to return to my old room where, aged four, I would sit for hours looking at the lake. As I dwelt there once more, it became obvious what I should do.

Surrounding the house was a huge thuja hedge that eclipsed the hilltop view on all sides. This had to go. A year later, in 1999, I enlisted the help of garden designer Tom Stuart-Smith. My brief was to bring all the views into the garden rather than exclude them, or merely glimpse vistas from a series of curated rooms. Thus, it has become a garden that is all about the landscape.

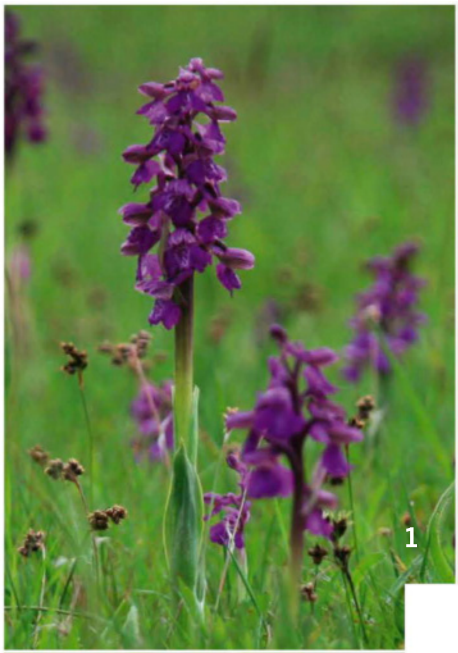
The meadow, like the garden, is 24 years old, and now covers 22 acres in three contiguous sections. For many years it was a fraction of that area, a modest foreground to the hilltop house. Now the meadow extends south, gently sloping down to the lakeside and then upwards to a hanging wood – Haile's Wood – which is our boundary, and the first full stop in a crumpled patchwork of undulating pinks and greens that runs towards Ross-on-Wye and the Forest of Dean.

For anyone considering creating a meadow, beware: there is no instant gratification. It's expensive. It's hard work. But, if you persevere, Nirvana's greatest hits await. My meadow muse was Miriam Rothschild, once a member of Alan Turing's Bletchley Park team, but also a wildflower expert, lepidopterist, eminent natural scientist and an expert on fleas. But it's her writings about meadows that resonate with me. Responding to a male ▷



Above Once just a field and now an orchid-rich meadow, it's hard to imagine just how challenging it was to clothe this hillside. Designer Tom Stuart-Smith helped Peter to anchor the house within a framework of ornamental plantings.

Right Wild-looking *Rosa* 'Wolley-Dod', which along with several other roses, including *R.* 'Abbotswood', *R.* x *hibernica* and *R. spinosissima*, creates an informal link between the woodland and meadow.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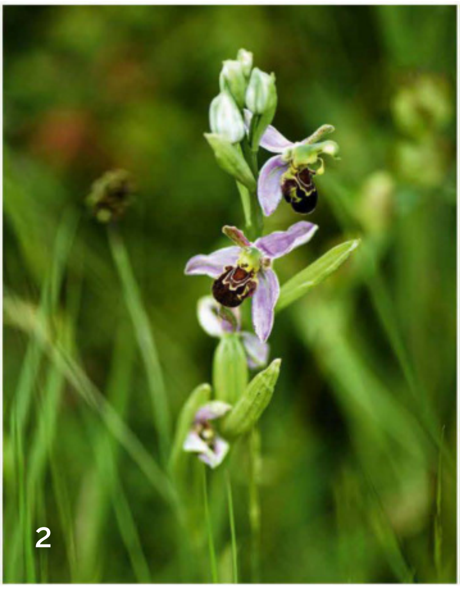
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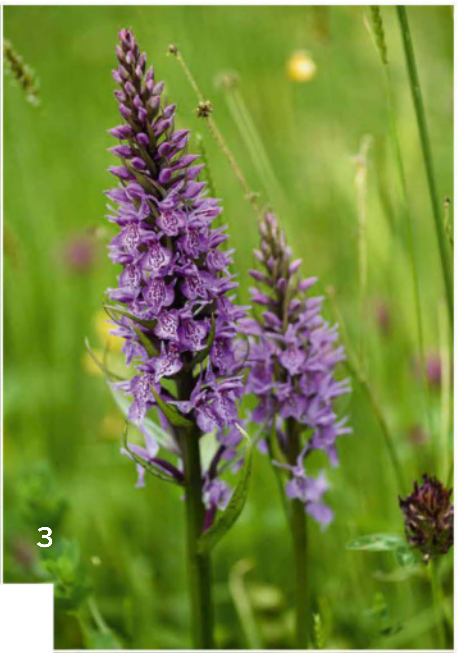
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8 of Peter's orchids

1 *Anacamptis morio* (green-winged orchid) Flowers range from white to deep purple and have distinctive green lines on their hood. 15cm. RHS H5[†].

2 *Ophrys apifera* (bee orchid) Pale-green or pink petals have a brown lip with yellow markings, resembling a bee. Flowers mid-spring or early summer. 30cm. RHS H6.

3 *Dactylorhiza fuchsii* (common spotted orchid) A tall specimen with dense spikes of purple, pink or white flowers with darker markings in late spring. 60cm. RHS H5.

4 *Anacamptis pyramidalis* (pyramidal orchid) Conical spikes of rich-pink flowers in midsummer. 60cm. RHS H5.

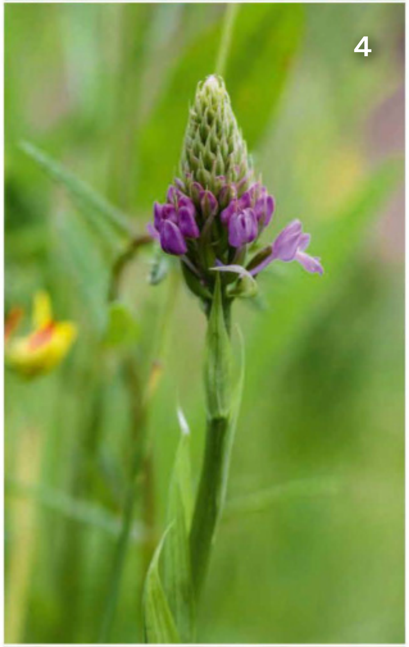
5 *Platanthera chlorantha* (greater butterfly orchid) Whitish flowers with a lovely evening scent. 60cm. RHS H6.

6 *Neottia ovata* (common twayblade) An unshowy but robust orchid whose flower spikes can carry up to 100 yellow-green flowers. 50cm.

7 *Orchis purpurea* (lady orchid) The dark-red upper petals of this stunning, unmistakable orchid form a hood over the white and dark-red lip. 80cm.

8 *Orchis mascula* (early purple orchid) Light to dark-purple flowers appear in early spring. 40cm. RHS H5.

[†] Hardiness ratings given where available.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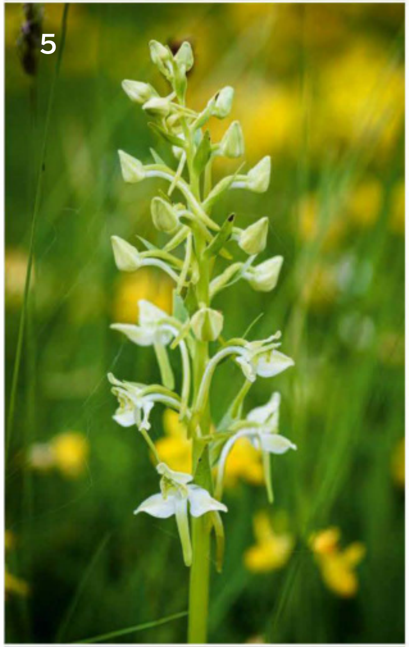
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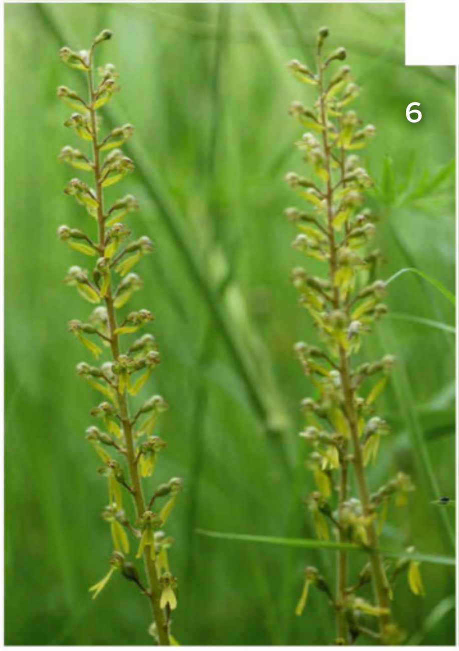
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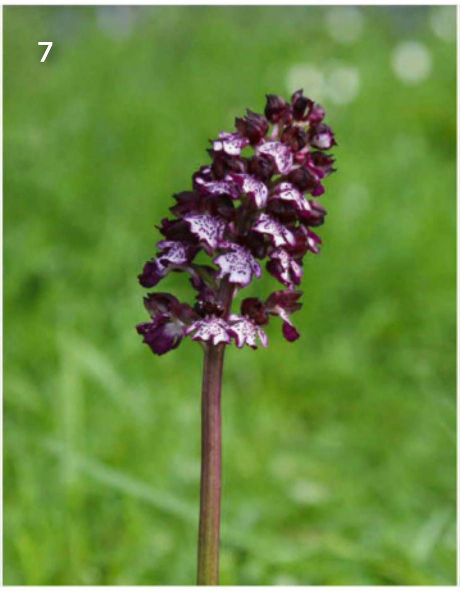
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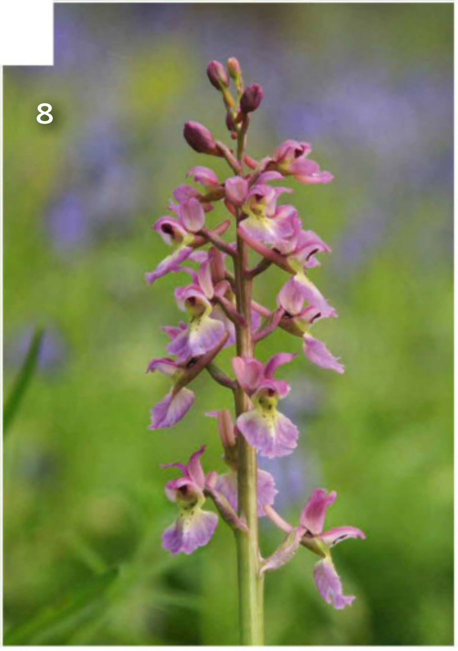
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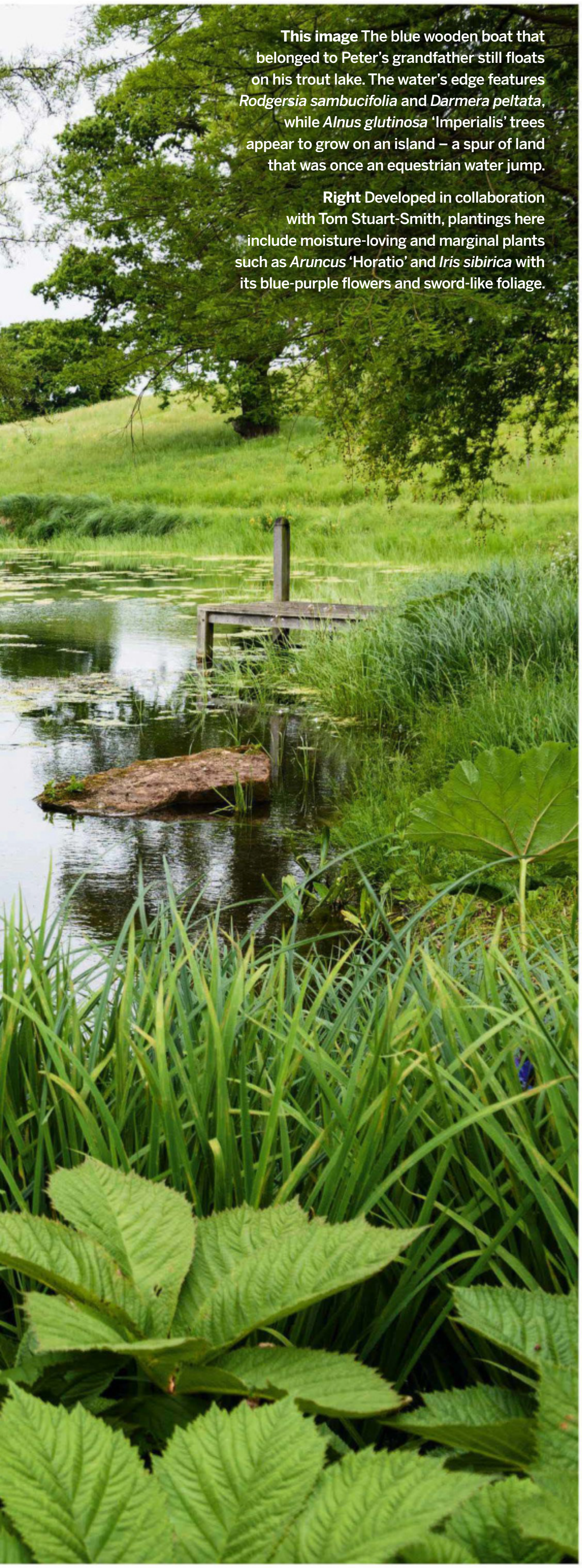
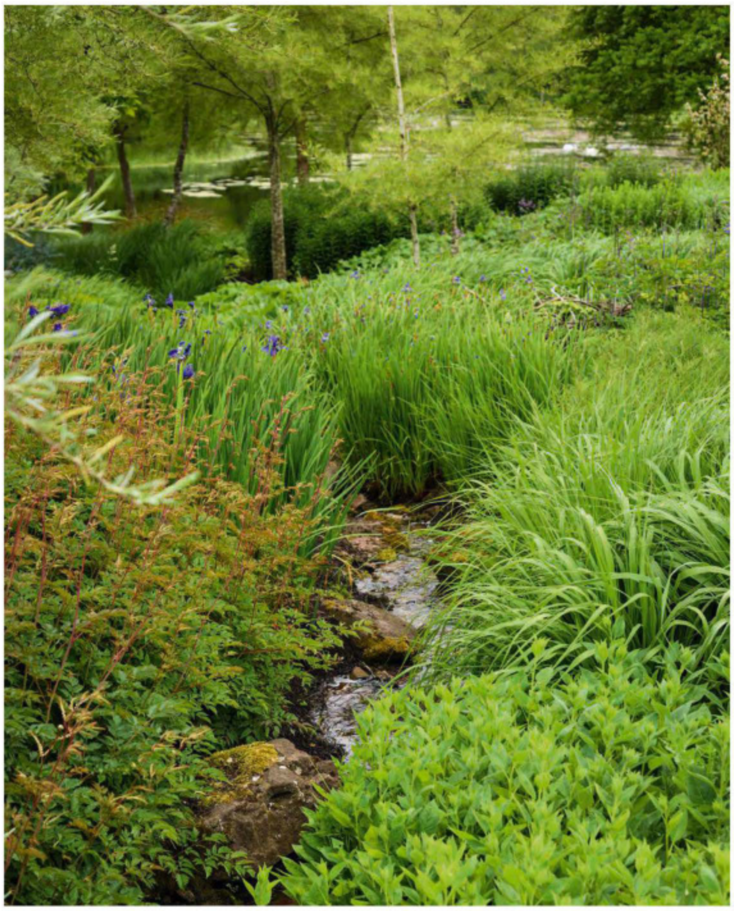
1, 7 & 8 PETER CLAY

I would sit for hours looking at the lake. As I dwelt there once more, it became obvious what I should do



This image The blue wooden boat that belonged to Peter's grandfather still floats on his trout lake. The water's edge features *Rodgersia sambucifolia* and *Darmera peltata*, while *Alnus glutinosa* 'Imperialis' trees appear to grow on an island – a spur of land that was once an equestrian water jump.

Right Developed in collaboration with Tom Stuart-Smith, plantings here include moisture-loving and marginal plants such as *Aruncus* 'Horatio' and *Iris sibirica* with its blue-purple flowers and sword-like foliage.



▷ colleague who scoffed that it would take 1,000 years to reproduce a medieval meadow, Miriam wrote: 'I could make a very good imitation in ten… it took me 15.' For us, it was 12 long years before the orchids arrived.

For those who want to polish their ecological halo, orchids are the litmus test, for they prove that you have a healthy soil. They are a sign that an invisible web of goodness has arrived – something magical and divine that is out of sight and beyond most people's cognition: the mycelial networks of mycorrhiza. These are the fungi without which the dust-like seeds of our most 'common' orchids cannot become plants. Orchid's seed has no endosperm (nutrient store) and so must depend on an alternative source of food. This is what the mycorrhizal fungi provide. They lock on to the seed and their mycelia allow substrate transfer from the nutrient highway that the fungi operate. A symbiotic relationship develops. It is, however, a relationship very much biased in the orchid's favour.

So why does it take so long before the fungi appear? In our case, it was because the meadow was planted in permanent pasture fertilised with inorganic fertiliser for nearly a century. Research has shown that nitrates and phosphates can build up in the soil and persist for years. Work by Dr Elena Arrigoni at Kew suggests that nitrate inhibits the development of fungal networks. As for phosphates, Dr Viswambharan Sarasan, also at Kew, found that the UK's most prolific orchid sites (near Colchester in Essex, and in Cumbria) had available phosphate levels of around 4mg/kg and 7mg/kg respectively. In my meadow, the levels were 22mg/kg when we started.

The poorer your soil, the more orchids like it. Given the right conditions, fungal highways and orchids proliferate rapidly. From not having a single orchid for the first 12 years, we have become a home for ten species in the second 12; thousands of flowers, in 'swarms', as the botanists so provocatively call them.

Our meadow is testament to the fact that if the conditions are right, you can successfully introduce new species either by seed or by introducing individual plants. In 2016, our local church ran a new drain through a patch of ground long populated by green-winged orchids, *Anacamptis morio*. Opportunistically, I transplanted four green-winged refugees to the ▷

▷ original meadow patch where marsh orchids proliferate, assuming the magical presence of mycorrhiza. The result has been extraordinary. In six years, the green-winged population grew from four plants to 1,633. Thus began my quest to see what other orchid species could be supported by the various fungi in the meadow.

The pyramidal orchid, *Anacamptis pyramidalis*, was a tip-off from a friend who had seen a local colony growing in builders' rubble. Collected seed was broadcast on low-nutrient meadow where a bungalow had once stood. It proved to be the perfect spot. Swathes of quaking grass provide a soft, shifting veil of pink-purple seedheads for this most elegant of orchids – a diva intent on denying her humble history.

I knew of other orchids found locally, at Joan's Hill Farm, a Plantlife reserve a couple of miles away, and at a newly established Coronation Meadow, even closer. The bee orchid, *Ophrys apifera*, appeared first, arriving on the wind, or the feet of a bird. My other new arrivals – the greater butterfly orchid, the early purple orchid and the common twayblade – came as gifts from meadow-obsessed friends. This year, their second, will give an indication of how well they have adapted; I am optimistic.

The meadow hums with hidden purpose. Nature is in her majestic pomp, showing what she can do if left to her own devices. And in the engine room is an organism that until now has been literally beneath our consideration, but one that agronomists would do well to understand and harness.

My meadow has meant more to me than I ever dreamed. I had wanted it to give me a childhood I could live vicariously. I hoped the meadow would be my children's magic carpet: the chance to run wild down endless grassy corridors, chasing butterflies and the sun.

It is this transcendence that we gardeners ache for. Much as I enjoy all the other pieces of the garden and, as if they were my children, love everything they have become, much as I wonder at the intelligence and artifice involved in creating beautifully conceived borders, it is in my quiet times, when I need solace or a sense of wonder, that I cherish nature's simple symphony. ◻

Above An evening view of the lake, which has evolved to become part of the meadow landscape. Grassy verges take on a coarser texture towards the water.

Facing page

1 Peter's grandfather, also called Peter, built this mossy, cast concrete rill in 1946. Gravity fed, with the appearance of stone, the rill playfully points uphill, joining the brook half a mile upstream.

2 West of the house, beech sentinels deftly define a generous garden room open to the landscape and guard the cliff-like slope down to Peter's perry orchard, where characterfully named local pears, such as 'Harley Gum', 'Hendre Huffcap' and 'Winnall's Longdon', grow.

3 Rediscovered as a shell in nearby Capler Wood, this shepherd's hut was lovingly restored during lockdown. Sited for views towards the lake, it acts as a romantic getaway and Peter's home office.

4 Swans return to the lake each year, chasing off the Canada geese to stake their claim on the territory.

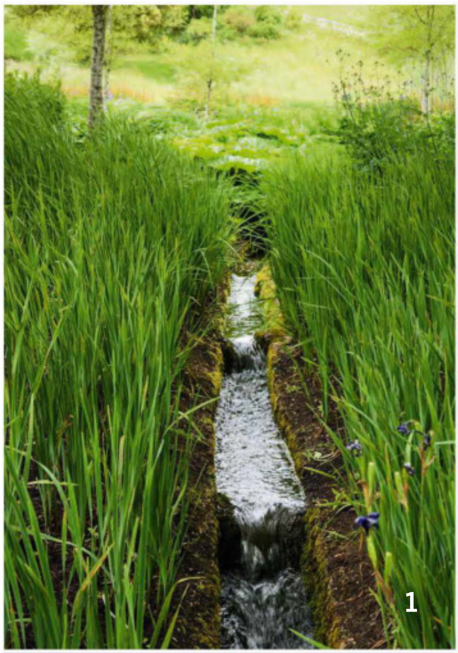
5 A stone in the meadow is carved with words of the Roman poet Horace that echo the dreams of many, including, perhaps, the Roman soldiers once stationed at the hill fort to the north of the garden: 'This is what I prayed for: a piece of land – not so very large, where there would be a garden, and near the house a spring of ever-flowing water, while up above, a small wood.'

6 The entrance to the house is almost concealed by the tall grass *Ampelodesmos mauritanicus*, and lush plantings of *Magnolia delavayi* and *Euphorbia characias* subsp. *wulfenii* that come right up to the front door, surrounded by the rambling rose *R.* 'Albéric Barbier'.

7 The Rocket Hive, by Matt Somerville of Bee Kind Hives, is a refuge for wild bees and is made from cedar and a 'hackle' of straw.

USEFUL INFORMATION

Brockhampton Cottage garden is open on Sunday 2 June, 11am-4pm, for the National Garden Scheme. **ngs.org.uk**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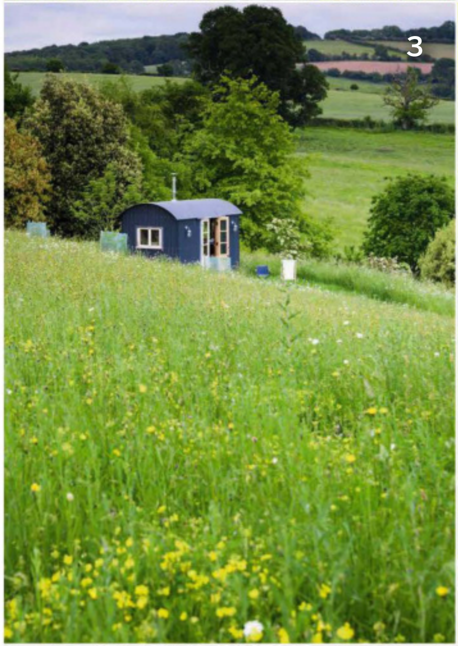
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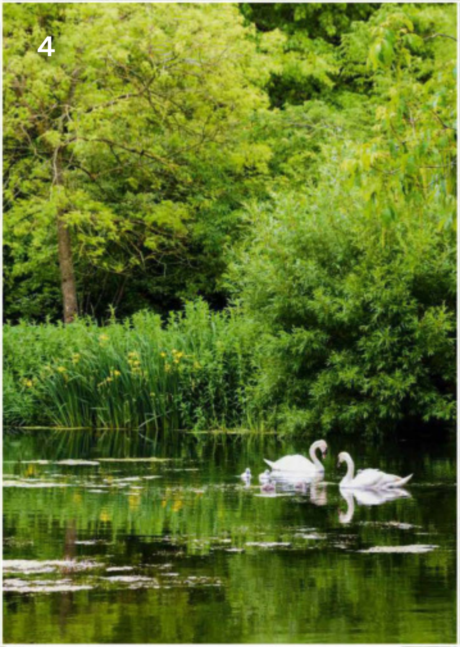
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KAZUYUKI ISHIHARA

The Japanese garden designer on Chelsea Flower Show nerves, and how coming from a city synonymous with war shaped his love of peaceful nature

WORDS PAULA McWATERS PORTRAIT NORI EDAMATSU

All show garden designers express their delight at winning a Gold medal at Chelsea, but few exhibit such unrestrained jubilation as Japanese designer Kazuyuki Ishihara, as he literally jumps for joy on medals day. Instantly recognisable for his broad smile, dapper suits and designer glasses, his happiness is infectious whenever he and his team celebrate another top accolade.

Kazuyuki made his first appearance at Chelsea 20 years ago, with a show garden called Gen, or Source, for which he won a Silver Gilt medal. Since then he has exhibited a further 14 times, notching up 12 coveted Gold medals and four Best in Show awards. HM Queen Elizabeth II – who Kazuyuki met at Chelsea many times – is said to have called him "the green magician".

All his gardens are created with utmost precision and even the back – unseen by visitors – is as immaculately finished as the visible areas, with never a leaf out of place. Quintessentially Japanese in style, his gardens are exquisite and serene. Acers always feature, along with irises, calming water, artfully placed stone and a preponderance of moss. Kazuyuki recalls how the judges took some convincing with regard to the virtues of moss as an acceptable garden feature in the early days, but now it seems we have all been won over.

I'D LIKE TO HELP CREATE A SOCIETY WHERE THERE ARE MORE FLOWERS, GREENERY AND SMILING FACES

Chelsea means the world to Kazuyuki and it is one of the absolute highlights of his year. "I always get anxious; no matter how many times I exhibit. The Gold medal is the prize." Although stressful, he finds the judging process invaluable. "The judges point out what might be wrong with my garden and I learn to improve next time. It becomes the driving force for gardening. Exhibiting in another country is difficult. It is essential to travel over with my own team of trusted craftsmen but I can't bring the Japanese plants that I would usually use; I have to source plants in the UK. A huge amount of money has to be raised each year but nevertheless, Chelsea is a dream I keep on dreaming."

Kazuyuki's passion for the natural world began in childhood. He was born in Nagasaki in 1958, a second-generation atomic bomb survivor, growing up just three miles from the hypocentre, where his father created terraced rice fields to help feed the surviving members of the Ishihara family. "We were self-sufficient in fruit and vegetables, and all the places where I played as a child were either landscapes or gardens," he says. "My father's love of flowers was an influence too." A deep appreciation for the power of plants, particularly their ability to create a sense of rebirth, clearly took root in him and, at the age of 22, he chose to study at Ikenobo, the prestigious school of Ikebana flower arranging.

Two years later, he started a small flower business, using locally grown cut flowers. Mixed fortunes followed, including serious floods in Nagasaki that washed away not only the flower fields but his delivery bike and car, but by the time he got married, aged 29, he was able to open his own flower shop and eventually a whole chain of stores. When the economic tide turned and he was forced to sell up, he turned to garden design. "Being born in Nagasaki has undoubtedly shaped me. I felt that it was my mission to become a gardener and to create gardens of peace around the world," he says.

He has built up a loyal team. "I've spent my life with them, not just gardening. There have been some hard times and some fun times, but whatever, it is they who inspire me to pass on my skills to the next generation." And the Ishihara legacy continues, as three of his children work in garden landscaping.

Kazuyuki now divides his time between Tokyo and the city of his birth. In the latter he has created Mihara, a legacy garden that sums up his design philosophy.

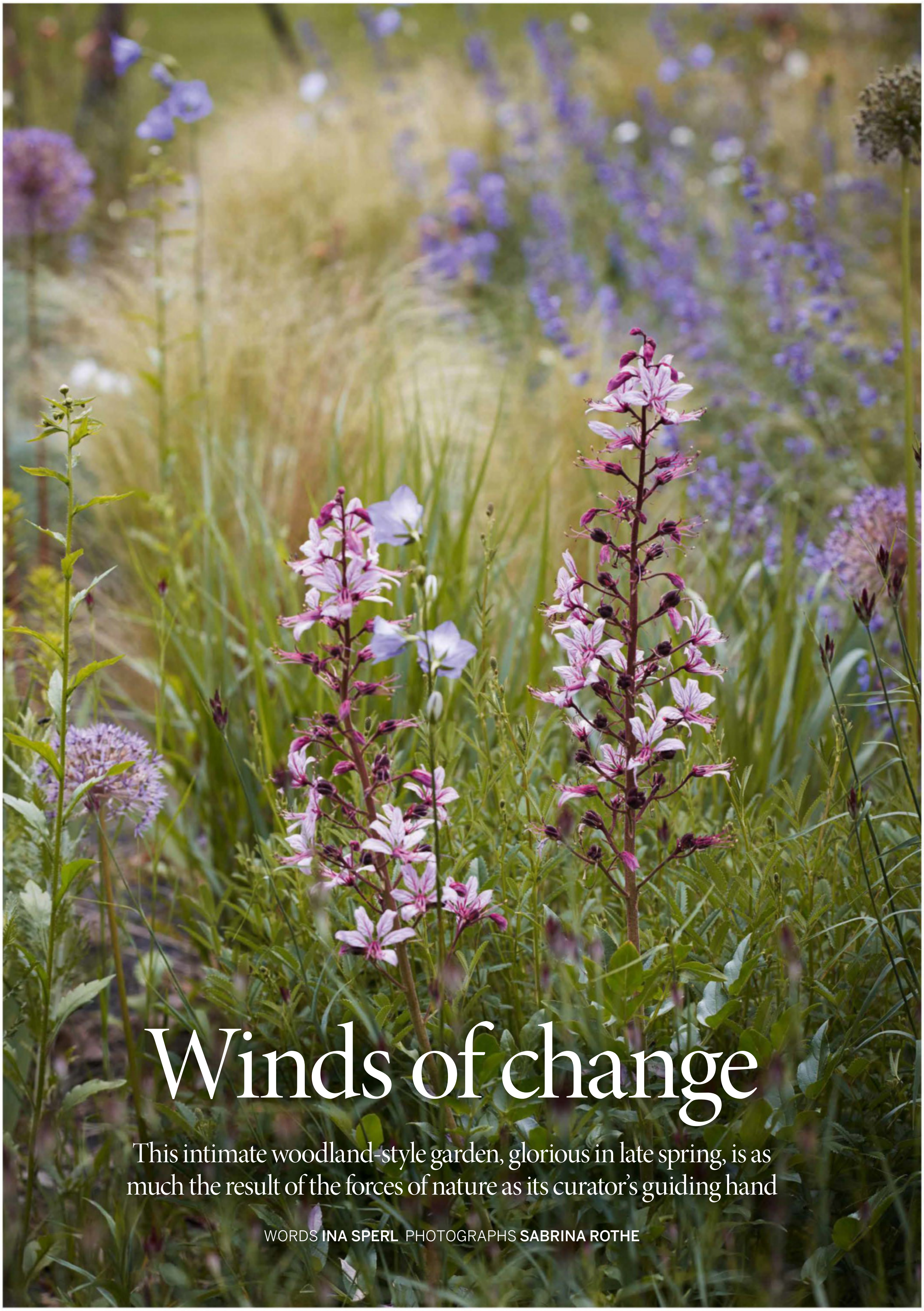
"Unfortunately, the population of Nagasaki is shrinking by some 10,000 every year," he says. "I want to help revitalise this city and try to create jobs through the power of gardens." He describes Mihara as a life's work, something he's put his heart and soul into, with the aim of attracting as many visitors as possible to experience Japanese garden design on home turf.

In many senses, Kazuyuki regards himself as a green ambassador. "Shaped by my experience as a second-generation atomic bomb survivor, I'd like to help create a society where there are more flowers, more greenery and – through that – more smiling faces," he says.

At the busiest pedestrian intersection in the world, Shibuya Crossing in Tokyo, he is proud to have created a public garden with bonsai trees in the style of a *tsubo-niwa* (a small traditional Japanese garden) that will be seen by millions. "Up to 500,000 people pass through every day and many pause to take photographs." Here, as in other projects, his hope is that even people who aren't usually interested in gardens will be moved to take notice. ◻

USEFUL INFORMATION

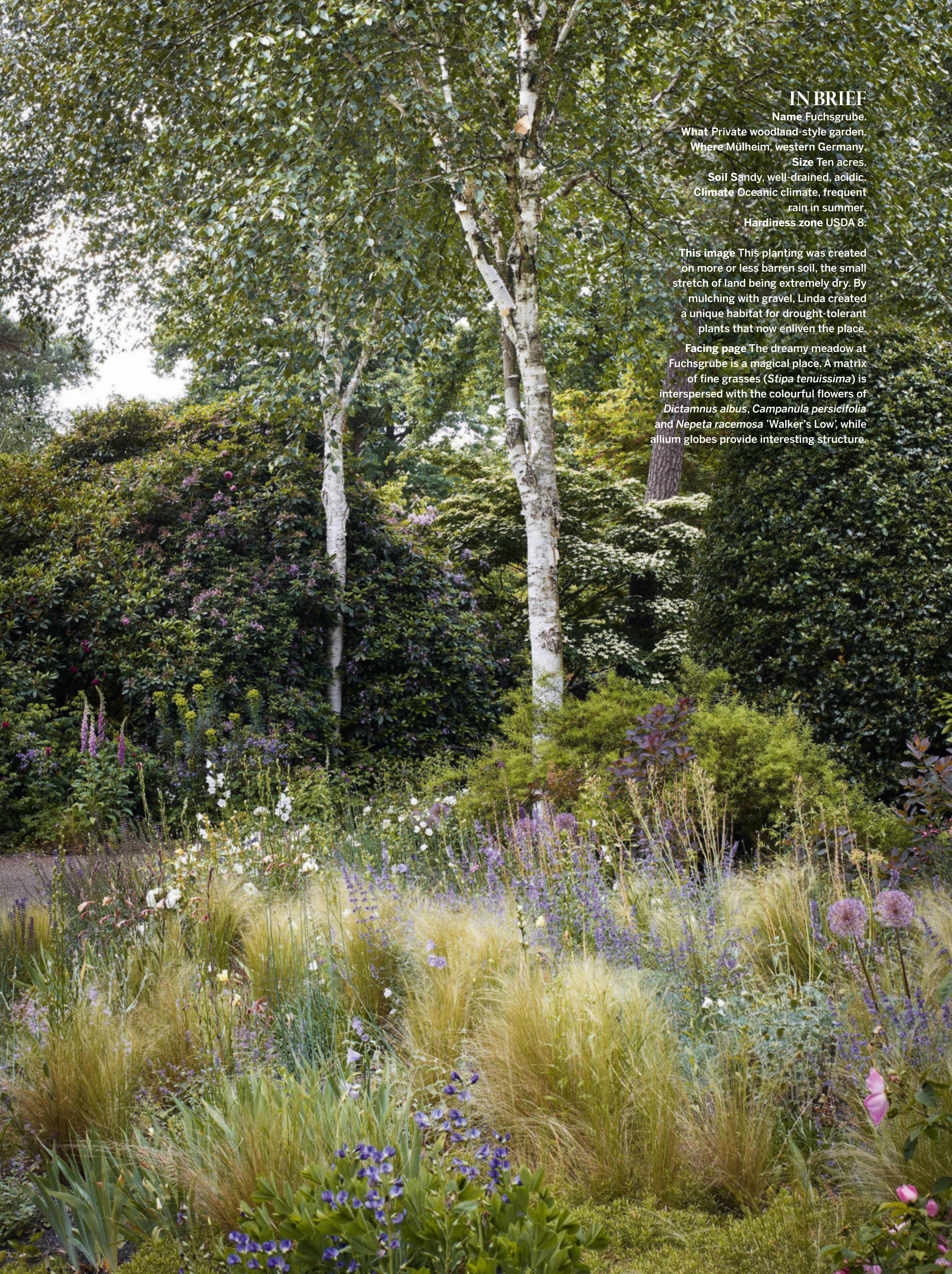
At the RHS Chelsea Flower Show 2024, look out for Kazuyuki Ishihara's Sanctuary garden, MOROTO no IE, which he has designed to blend the beauty of nature with happy family life and features a waterfall and a building camouflaged with green walls.



Winds of change

This intimate woodland-style garden, glorious in late spring, is as much the result of the forces of nature as its curator's guiding hand

WORDS **INA SPERL** PHOTOGRAPHS **SABRINA ROTHE**

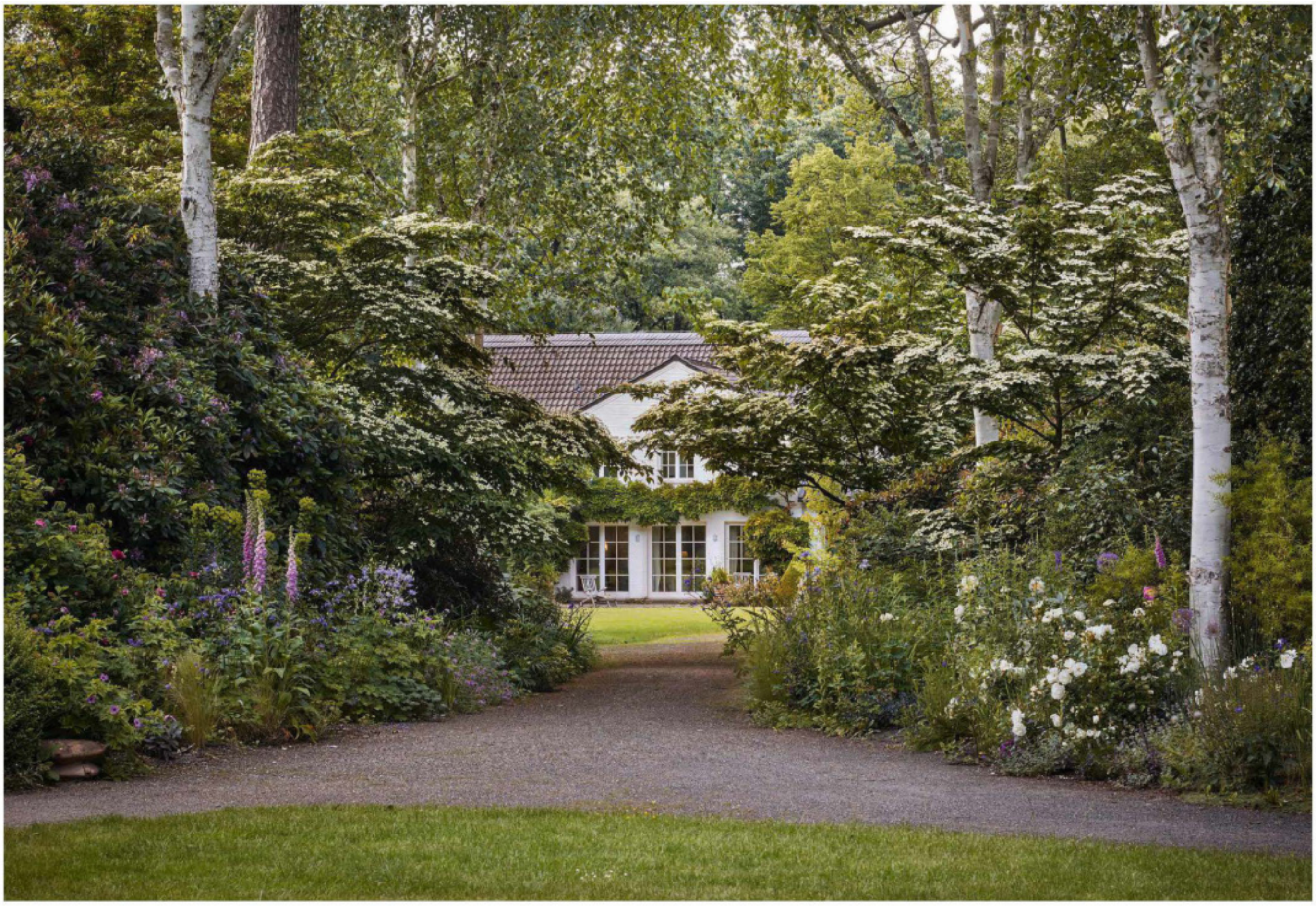


IN BRIEF

Name Fuchsgrube.
What Private woodland-style garden.
Where Mülheim, western Germany.
Size Ten acres.
Soil Sandy, well-drained, acidic.
Climate Oceanic climate, frequent rain in summer.
Hardiness zone USDA 8.

This image This planting was created on more or less barren soil, the small stretch of land being extremely dry. By mulching with gravel, Linda created a unique habitat for drought-tolerant plants that now enliven the place.

Facing page The dreamy meadow at Fuchsgrube is a magical place. A matrix of fine grasses (*Stipa tenuissima*) is interspersed with the colourful flowers of *Dictamnus albus*, *Campanula persicifolia* and *Nepeta racemosa* 'Walker's Low', while allium globes provide interesting structure.



When Linda Zimmermann first set foot on the grounds of her Fuchsgrube garden, she was put off. “I did not want to live in a cemetery,” she says, referring to the impression she had upon seeing the thicket of over-mature trees and large rhododendrons that came right up to the house, spreading darkness and a claustrophobic feeling. It’s hard to imagine this scene now, 20 years later, as your gaze wanders over the expanse of lawn with perfectly placed trees, and the promise of mysterious woodland beyond.

Fuchsgrube garden lies on the outskirts of Mülheim, a city in the Ruhr region of western Germany, a highly urbanised industrial area, where air pollution was high in the early 20th century. Linda and her husband Wolfgang’s house is part of a ‘garden city’ that was built in 1912 to provide fresh air to residents. Their grounds are located next to a nature reserve, and are not suitable for building on – which is why Linda’s garden is exceptionally large and has a park-like atmosphere.

When the couple arrived in 2003, they decided to take down 120 old trees that were at risk of collapsing, resulting in the wide-open space Linda longed for. Fortunately, an impressive northern red oak (*Quercus rubra*) was healthy and could remain standing. The first tree Linda planted herself was a *Cornus controversa*, which she had long been smitten with because of its radiance against the tapestry of dark shrubs. Intuitively placed in the right spot, it works as an eye-catcher, brightening up the darkest area of the garden. Linda has a fine sense of proportion and harmony. She comes from an artistically minded family, and studied at the art academy of Stuttgart, so it is no surprise that for 30 years, she was in charge of the art collection of a regional state bank.

However, as Linda was creating a new sense of space in the garden, drawing inspiration from art and arboretums, Storm Kyrill met the garden with its destructive force in January 2007. Its impact left the garden completely changed. A total of 320 trees fell down, and new paths had to be cut into the woods to take them out. “That was devastating,” says Linda, “but it also gave me the chance to think anew.”

Her response, the resulting redesign of the garden, means that if you visit now, once you have crossed the large lawn and left behind the large ‘Cunningham’s White’ rhododendron that marks its boundary, the atmosphere changes completely, from open space to an intimate woodland area. “The lawn with the eye-catching trees is important for the view from the house,” ▷

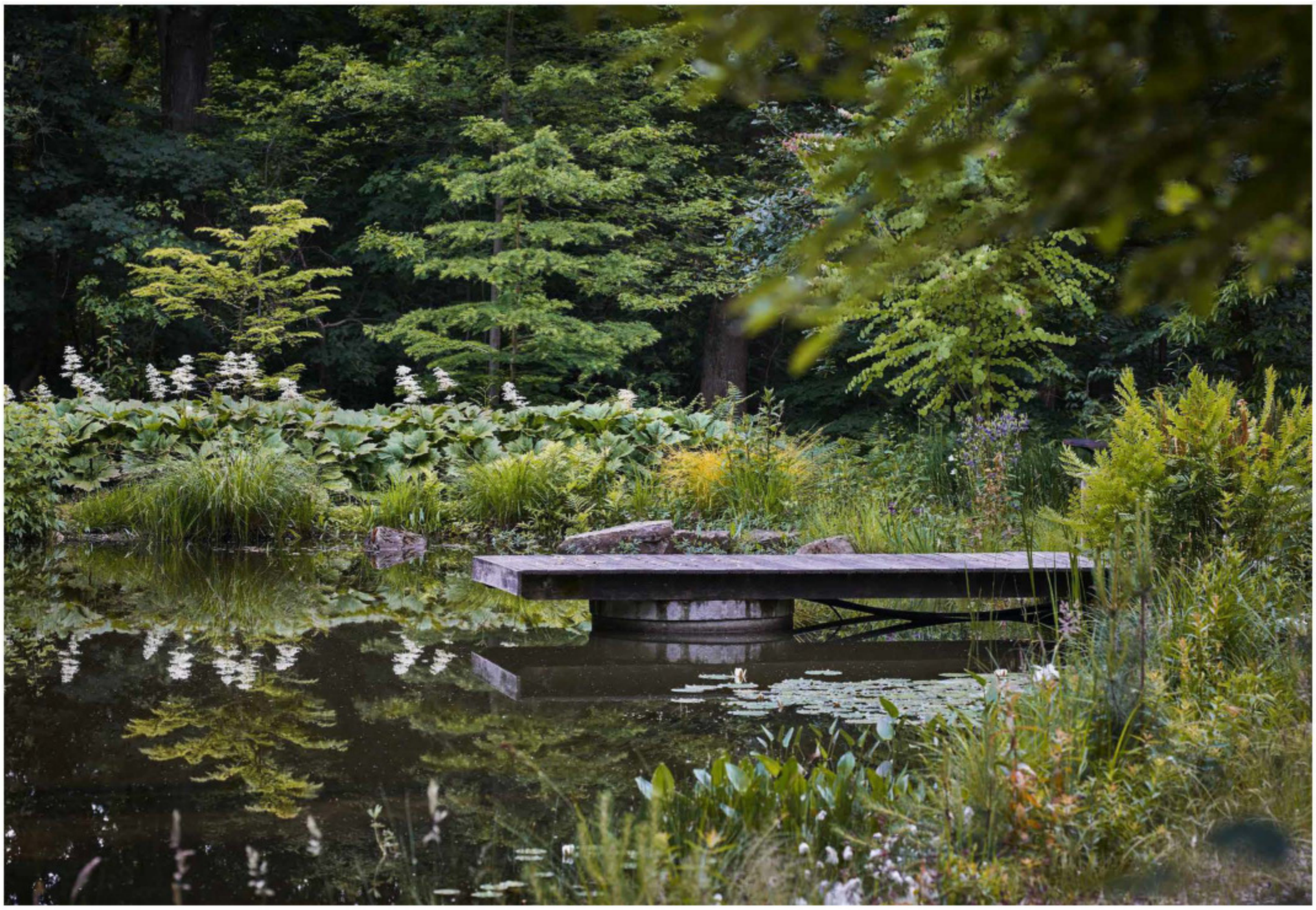
To continue turn to page 82

Left Dogwoods are a recurrent theme in Fuchsgrube garden, as Linda loves white-flowering shrubs. Elegant *Cornus kousa* var. *chinensis* ‘White Fountain’ is best experienced from the seat beneath. Later in the year, the Chinese stewartia (*Stewartia rostrata*, in the foreground) will open its buds.

Above Linda’s house seen from her woodland garden: *Betula utilis* subsp. *jacquemontii* and *Cornus kousa* var. *chinensis* ‘Wieting’s Select’ frame the view. White *Rosa* ‘Snowflake’ echo the white stems of the birches. *Digitalis purpurea* and *Aquilegia vulgaris* add colourful accents to the beds.

Aside from giving her beloved trees a space to grow, Linda's focus is mostly on spring and autumn interest – the seasons for greenery and blossom

The birch copse near the pond has become one of Linda's favourite places in the garden. Moss and ferns dominate the ground beneath the trees until the foxgloves appear. The copse opens up into a wild meadow with a mown path.



▷ says Linda, "but the hidden garden rooms are more important for my daily garden experience."

Here, she nurtures small garden treasures such as a collection of *Galanthus*, erythroniums, ferns and other spring woodlanders. Further along the path, a wooden gate opens on to a spacious clearing, and a large pond. It also owes its existence to Kyrill, as the space for it was created after the root plates of large old trees were lifted by the storm. The water is surrounded by a dreamy meadow that merges into a birch copse. The trees have established themselves, and the copse is now one of Linda's favourite spots, whether it is the foxgloves in flower in spring, or later when, hundreds of fairy-toadstool-like *Amanita muscaria* emerge in autumn.

Birch trees have a special place in Linda's heart. "I like their lightness, their elegance and grace." Over the years, they have become the signature trees of Fuchsgrube garden. On her lawn, she has placed them in small groups, using the divine proportion of the golden ratio to arrange their composition. Apart from this, Linda is no lover of detailed plans – she prefers to let her garden develop gradually. "When I came here, I wanted to put my hands in the soil, and get to know it by gardening," she says. Besides giving her beloved trees such as *Acer griseum* and *Acer palmatum* 'Shishi-gashira' a place to grow, Linda is focused mostly on spring and autumn interest – the seasons when she longs most for greenery and blossom.

Rather by chance, she has also recently transformed a dry spot that had long been problematic into a fine, meadow-like planting for late spring. The meadow-style area, where grasses and alliums flourish, and evening primroses and dittany spread their scent, used to be a strip of more or less dead land. For 15 years, Linda watched this space, unsure what to do with it. "This was the driest part of my garden. Nothing would grow here, and I did not know why," she says. Five years ago, she added a layer of gravel and planted *Nepeta racemosa* 'Walker's Low', and after repeatedly mulching, a special habitat was created. "It has become a magical place." Linda populated the space with enchanting *Stipa tenuissima*, *Gypsophila repens* and *Dictamnus albus*, *Oenothera stricta* 'Sulphurea', *Campanula persicifolia* and *Allium* 'Lucy Ball'.

This planting is modern and dynamic – the *Stipa* is permitted to run free, as is *Erigeron karvinskianus*, with its delicate and pretty flowers. "Plants are allowed to go to seed, but I edit. My garden will never be static, never finished," Linda says. "I am happy about every change – even if it starts as a major challenge." ☐

USEFUL INFORMATION
See more of Linda's garden on Instagram
@fuchsgrube_garden

Above The pond was created when Storm Kyrill toppled large trees. This area is planted naturalistically to blend in with the woodland. *Rodgersia aesculifolia* form the transition to the grove, their cream flowerheads reflected in the water. *Carex elata* add lightness.

Right Dynamism is allowed, so that this meadow-like planting shows a different picture every year. In late spring the happy combination of *Nepeta racemosa* 'Walker's Low', *Allium* 'Lucy Ball' and *Oenothera stricta* 'Sulphurea' adds colour to the wispy grass *Stipa tenuissima*.

Plants are allowed to go to seed, but I edit. My garden will never be static, never finished. I am happy about every change

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CHELSEA 2024 PREVIEW

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SARAH CUTTLE, OLIVER DIXON, LUKE MACGREGOR, NEIL HEPWORTH / RHS

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- Keep up to date with our ongoing online coverage of this year's show by scanning the QR code below with your phone camera or go to: **gardensillustrated.com/chelsea-flower-show**.

And to sign up to our Chelsea newsletter. Go to **try.gardensillustrated.com/chelsea-newsletter**

UP AND TRENDING

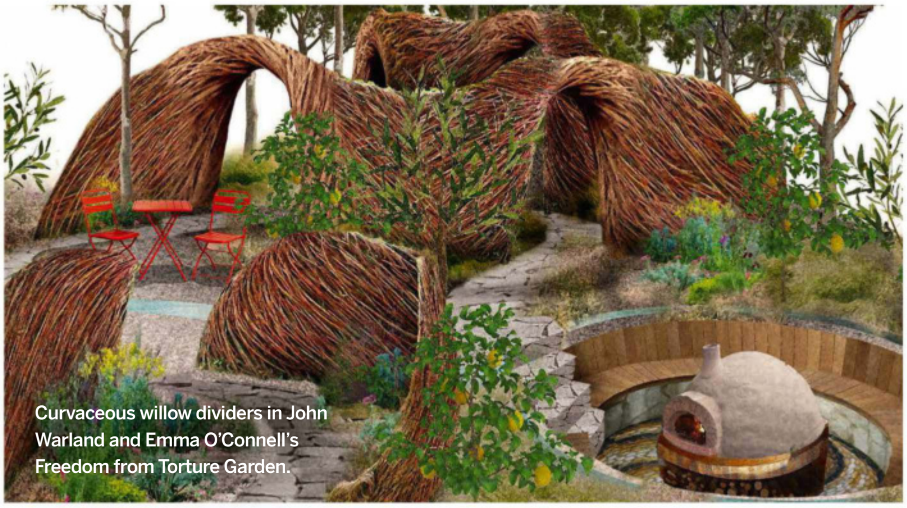
It's difficult to predict what the big trends will be at the Chelsea Flower Show each year, but we have trawled the garden designs and spoken to designers and growers to draw out the themes we think will take the spotlight at the 2024 show

WORDS MOLLY BLAIR, STEPHANIE MAHON AND VERONICA PEERLESS

Health and community

The general themes of health and inclusion are once again to the fore, with several projects sponsored via the Project Giving Back scheme based on the management of, or recovery from, conditions such as muscular dystrophy, cancer and stroke, and featuring biophilic and therapeutic design elements. There are gardens concerned with HIV and skin diseases, as well as those designed for people who are grieving, and those with learning disabilities and/or autism.

More of the show gardens than ever are accessible, such as the Panathlon Joy Garden, which is the first wheelchair-accessible All About Plants garden to feature at Chelsea. Miria Harris's and Ann-Marie Powell's gardens also feature sloping paths rather than steps, with spaces and surfaces within considered in terms of ease of movement for wheelchair users. Many designs are based on the idea of a communal or public garden space where people can come together, including Robert Myers' St James's Piccadilly Garden, which will also feature a sculptural timber counselling cabin.


Curvaceous willow dividers in John Warland and Emma O'Connell's Freedom from Torture Garden.

Beautiful boundaries

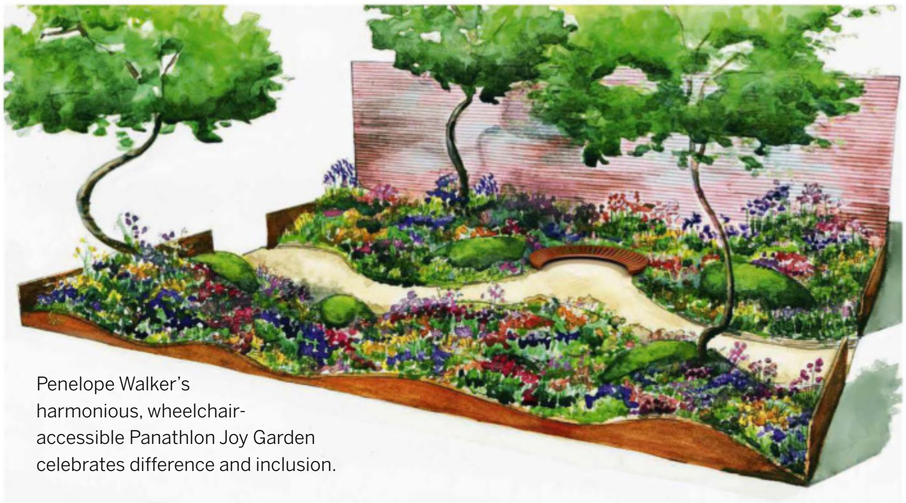
With sustainability becoming a central focus for this year's show, and so many designers trying to go cement and concrete free, it's not surprising that many of the designs highlight interesting materials, especially for boundaries and dividing features.

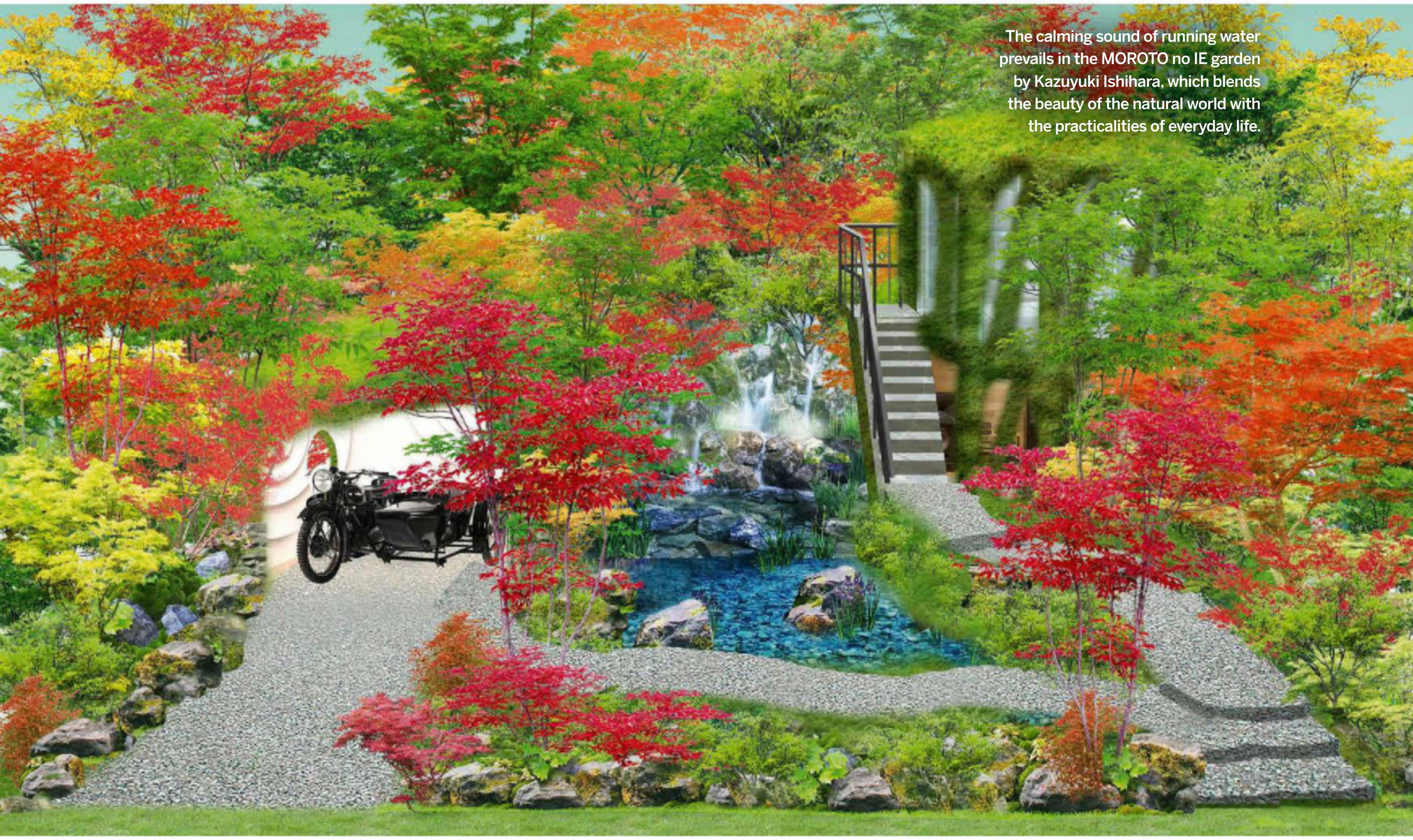
Natural materials abound, from the simple chestnut posts and hazel rods edging Tom Stuart-Smith's National Garden Scheme (NGS) woodland garden to the bold, enveloping willow dividers in The Freedom from Torture Garden. A collaboration between John Warland and willow artist Tom Hare, they are intended to create informal spaces for therapy or relaxing in, helping the garden feel like a 'horticultural hug'.

The rear of Dan Bristow's Size of Wales garden boasts an 8m-long, compostable 'fungus fence' – highlighting the importance of fungi in the health of forests – made from woodland thinnings and inoculated with oyster and lion's mane mushrooms.

Materials usually used in the sustainable building trade will also feature. The Stroke Association's garden has a wall of hempcrete blocks finished with a lime render, while the National Autistic Society Garden features expanded cork walls as dividers.

Recycled materials play a key role too. Ula Maria's woodland garden for Muscular Dystrophy UK features a bungaroosh wall, traditionally a cheap way to create a wall using leftover materials on a building site. Ula's beautiful example echoes the reclaimed materials used around the garden. The boundary of Matthew Childs' Terrence Higgins Trust Garden is recycled timber, and in the RHS Chelsea Repurposed Garden by


Penelope Walker's harmonious, wheelchair-accessible Panathlon Joy Garden celebrates difference and inclusion.



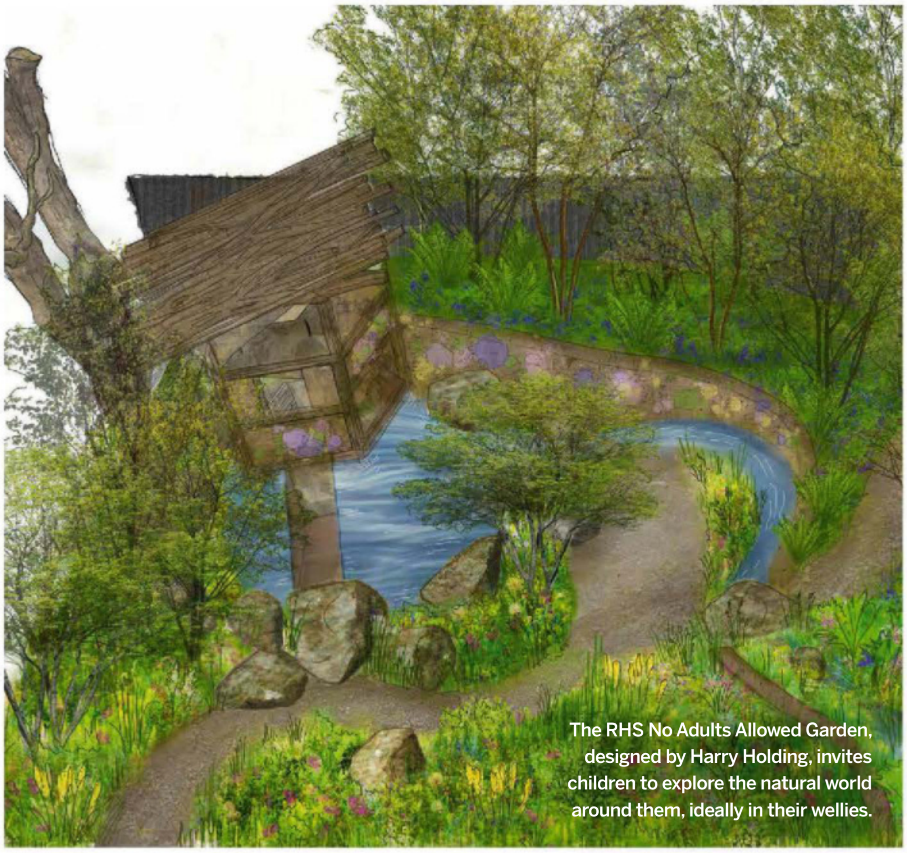
The calming sound of running water prevails in the MOROTO no IE garden by Kazuyuki Ishihara, which blends the beauty of the natural world with the practicalities of everyday life.

Darryl Moore, a 'celebration of creative recycling', nearly everything has already appeared in a Chelsea garden before.

Water, water everywhere

Water is everywhere at Chelsea this year. It's as if designers knew that winter and spring would be among the wettest on record, because many are looking at ways to make the most of rain and manage an abundance of it. The WaterAid and Flood Re gardens are entirely built around these ideas, but others, such as The NGS Garden and The Water Saving Garden by Sam Proctor, also feature rainwater-harvesting systems.

The gentle sound of running water will be all around from the multitude of watercourses on show, from Ula Maria's soft-edged rill to slow run-off rainwater, to The Freedom from Torture Garden's sinuous channel. We predict more of a noisy splashing sound from the RHS No Adults Allowed Garden by Harry Holding, where a natural den has been sunk into a wetland pool with an invitation for kids to let loose in their wellies. For the adults, it's more of a dunk on offer, in the cold plunge pool that is the centrepiece of The Ecotherapy Garden ▷



The RHS No Adults Allowed Garden, designed by Harry Holding, invites children to explore the natural world around them, ideally in their wellies.

Holly Johnston's Bridgerton garden, based on the hit Netflix series.

▷ by Tom Bannister. There are also lots of wildlife ponds, and several cascades, with Kazuyuki Ishihara's tumbling waterfall and a daring pergola-fed feature in the Killik & Co garden. The prize for the most intriguing aquascape goes to Matthew Childs for his flooded quarry garden, the water level of which will rise and fall during the show.

But we predict the most Instagrammed water feature at the show will probably be the Regency-inspired Bridgerton garden designed by Holly Johnston and sponsored by Netflix, with many visitors wishing to have their own Featherington fantasy moment from the hit show.

Edible landscapes

When it comes to planting, because of the time of year, late-spring plants abound in woodland-style schemes with lots of multi-stemmed trees. That aside, even the nurseries growing plants to order for the show are finding it difficult to identify a common thread in what they've been asked to produce, apart from a heavier focus on resilient and native plants – meaning plenty of diversity in the planting schemes across the show.

One trend we have noticed is that many designers are weaving edible plants into their designs for aesthetic as well as edible value, a practice known as foodscaping. These 'edimentals' (edible ornamentals) feature in several gardens, including The Bowel Research UK Microbiome Garden, where *Bistorta officinalis* and camassias are being championed as edibles. The Pulp Friction – Growing Skills Garden features medlars, filberts, a pretty yellow cultivar of alpine strawberries and an edible hedge made of runner beans with red-and-white flowers.

The 'fungus fence' in the Size of Wales garden will comprise edible golden oyster, blue oyster and lion's mane mushrooms.

In The Freedom from Torture Garden, edible plants such as chickpeas, nigella and cardoon are part of the planting scheme. The Planet Good Earth Garden, which has been designed as a food forest, features hydroponic grow towers planted with rainbow chard and kale alongside hanging mushroom sacks.

Designer pairs

Seven of the show gardens this year have been designed by two people. Some of the pairs have known each other for a while. Will Dutch and Tin-Tin Azure-Marxen (Pulp Friction – Growing Skills Garden) work together in their day jobs, having met at Writtle University College. Sid Hill and Chris Hull (Bowel Research UK Garden) met as teenagers and studied together at Duchy College before eventually setting up their own landscape businesses.

Two gardens are collaborations between garden designers and architects. Tom Massey and architect Je Ahn (WaterAid Garden) first worked together for the London Design Festival in 2020. Designer Sophie Parmenter initially contacted architect Dido Milne about using expanded cork for the National Autistic Society Garden; they have ended up working on the garden together.

On the Flood Re garden, writer and garden consultant Naomi Slade teamed up with Dr Ed Barsley, a specialist in environmental design and flood resilience.

Collaborators Tom Massey (left) and Je Ahn join forces on The WaterAid Garden for this year's show.
KATIE McCRAW

The Freedom from Torture Garden is the first pairing of six-time RHS Gold medal-winning conceptual artist John Warland and award-winning garden designer Emma O'Connell.

Collaborating means taking advantage of complementary skillsets and spreading a heavy workload. "It's having someone to run things past, to talk through a decision or an issue that has arisen," says Will Dutch. "The second pair of eyes helps with the confidence in delivering something great." Dido Milne points out: "You go on a journey you might not expect at the beginning." Naomi Slade adds: "You learn about things that are out of your normal sphere – and you gain a new perspective on things." ☐

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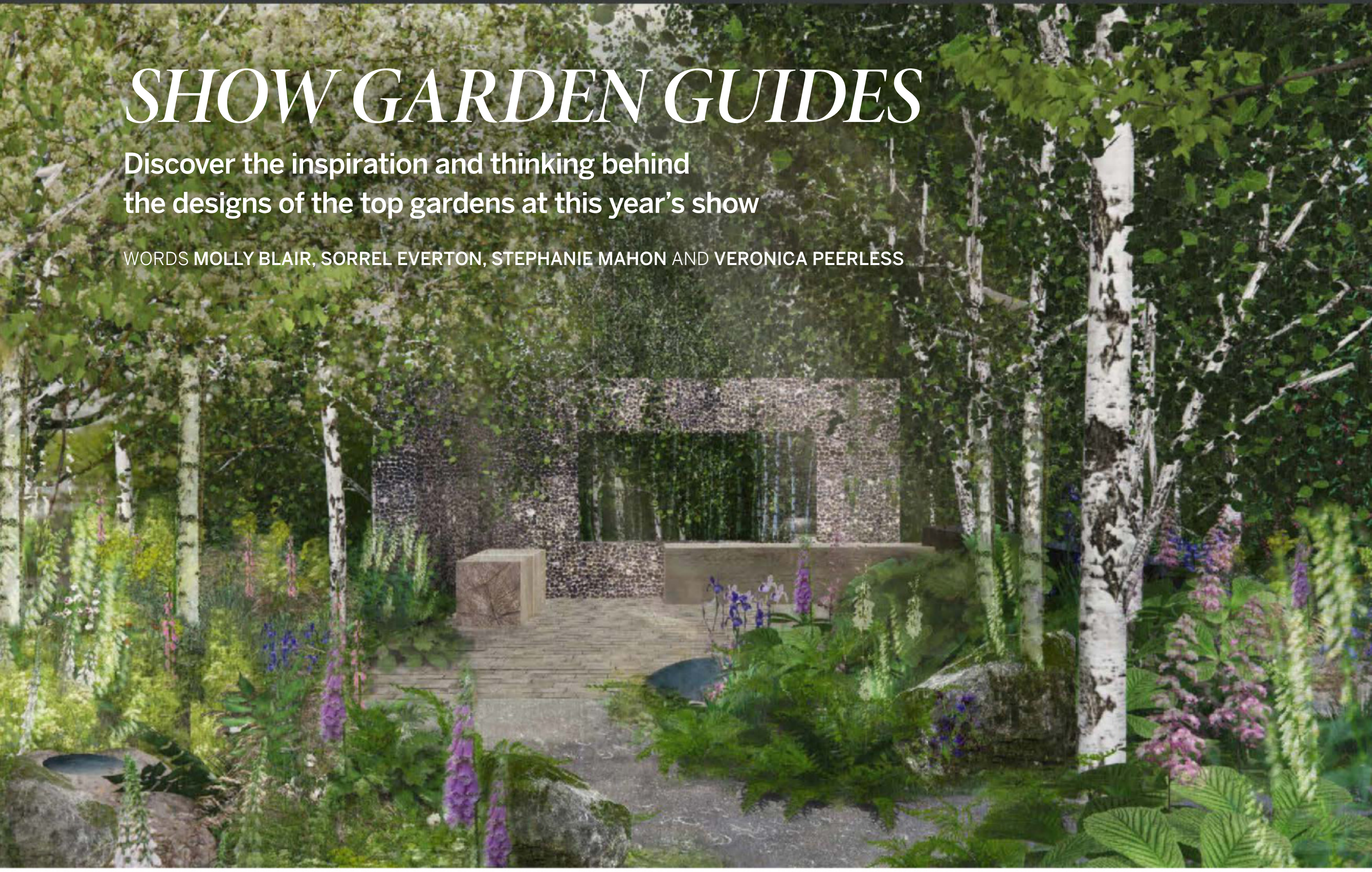
SHOW GARDEN GUIDES

Discover the inspiration and thinking behind the designs of the top gardens at this year's show

WORDS **MOLLY BLAIR, SORREL EVERTON, STEPHANIE MAHON** AND **VERONICA PEERLESS**



Muscular Dystrophy UK Garden

Designer Ula Maria.

Sponsor Project Giving Back for Muscular Dystrophy UK.

Theme A sanctuary space inspired by the Japanese art of forest bathing for the Muscular Dystrophy UK community.

Contractor Crocus.

Plants Deepdale Trees, Kelways.

After the show The garden will be relocated to the Institute of Developmental and Regenerative Medicine in Oxford.

Contact ulamaria.com

Ula Maria initially had in mind a Sanctuary Garden for this year's show, but Project Giving Back and the RHS loved the concept and offered her a Show Garden on Main Avenue. "It snowballed," says Ula, who was RHS Young Designer of the Year in 2017.

Her design is inspired by the Japanese art of forest bathing, which has many health benefits. During her research, Ula met Martin, who was diagnosed with muscular dystrophy (MD) in his twenties. "Outside the hospital there was nowhere to sit and process his diagnosis. He had to sit in his car. I wanted to create a space where a person can breathe and process their thoughts."

The garden subtly tells the charity's story via its hard landscaping. The central hub has a knapped flint wall that reflects the effect MD has on muscles, inspired by microscope images. Patients told Ula that visiting woodland can be difficult for them, so all of the organic paths are wheelchair accessible.

But Ula wants the garden to be about the plants. Inspired by a birch grove, it has more than 50 native trees, mostly *Betula utilis* but also flood-tolerant alder near the water bowl and *Crataegus* x *lavalleei* 'Carrierei'. Woodland-edge plants are knitted together by rushes and grasses, including *Luzula nivea* and *Briza media*, while *Geranium sylvaticum* 'Mayflower', foxgloves and wild strawberries (a nod to Ula's Lithuanian childhood) give subtle colour.

Ula's contractor is Crocus, which is also growing plants for the woodland NGS Garden by Chelsea veteran Tom Stuart-Smith, for whom she once worked freelance. She has already laid out the design at Deepdale Trees, so feels reassured: "I'm in safe hands."

5 KEY ELEMENTS

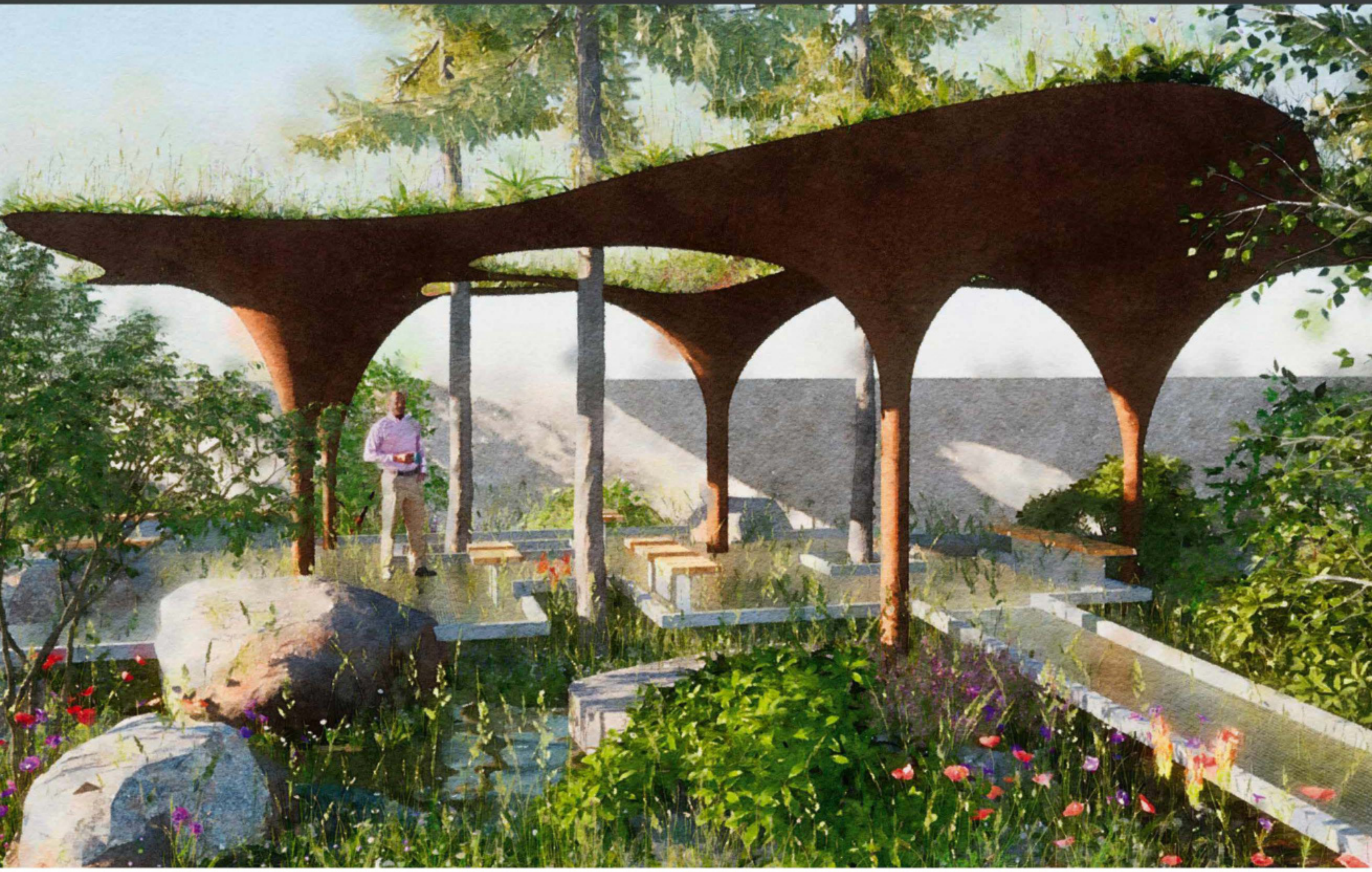
1 **Fifty trees, mostly silver birch.** This is a lot more than most Chelsea Show Gardens, which usually have around ten.

2 **Natural materials** that could have derived from a woodland, such as clay and stone. Ula has sourced 120-year-old handmade clay pavers from a reclamation yard online, which were already covered in moss, for an aged look.

3 **The central hub area**, open to the sky, is a 'woodland glade' where people can gather. The knapped flint wall structure reflects the muscle cells in those affected by muscular dystrophy.

4 **A bungaroosh wall** Ula spotted one of these on a bike ride on the south coast, made from clay tiles, flint and seashells. "In the past, builders used everything left over onsite to build a wall. Here we're doing it in a considered way, using reclaimed materials."

5 **A large clay water bowl**, 2m in diameter, spills into a naturalised rill that runs through the centre of the garden.



WaterAid Garden

Designers Tom Massey and Je Ahn.

Sponsors Project Giving Back for WaterAid.

Theme The capture and storage of rainwater for further use.

Contractor Landscape Associates.

Plants Hortus Loci.

Contact tommassey.co.uk; studioweave.com

PORTRAIT KATIE McCRAW

The focal point of Tom Massey and Je Ahn's garden is a rainwater harvesting pavilion made from lapped sheets of weathering steel in funnel shapes. The structure, designed by Je Ahn, harvests rainfall, filtering and storing it for drinking and irrigation while also slowing water flow and providing shade. In the lowland areas, the environment is denser and wetter, moving into sparser, drier planting on the upper levels. The garden is filled with an array of resilient plants designed to tolerate these varying conditions. *Hottonia palustris* has been chosen for its sensitivity to water pollution and *Hesperaloe parviflora* for its drought resistance.

"One in ten people in the world don't have clean water close to home, and climate change is making it worse," says Tom. The garden celebrates water as a precious resource and the pavilion is inspired by WaterAid's work alongside communities around the world developing locally relevant, reliable, clean water solutions.

An open, galvanised steel deck runs throughout the garden, floating over the landscape, allowing water, wildlife and plants to move beneath. Everything is permeable, allowing for the easy passage of water through the space, and much of the material is reclaimed and repurposed to ensure a lighter carbon footprint.

The design isn't without its challenges. "The pavilion is a very bespoke item," explains Tom. "We hope it's not going to leak and will function as we expect. A rainwater harvesting structure that doesn't harvest effectively wouldn't be ideal, especially under scrutiny from RHS judges."

5 KEY ELEMENTS

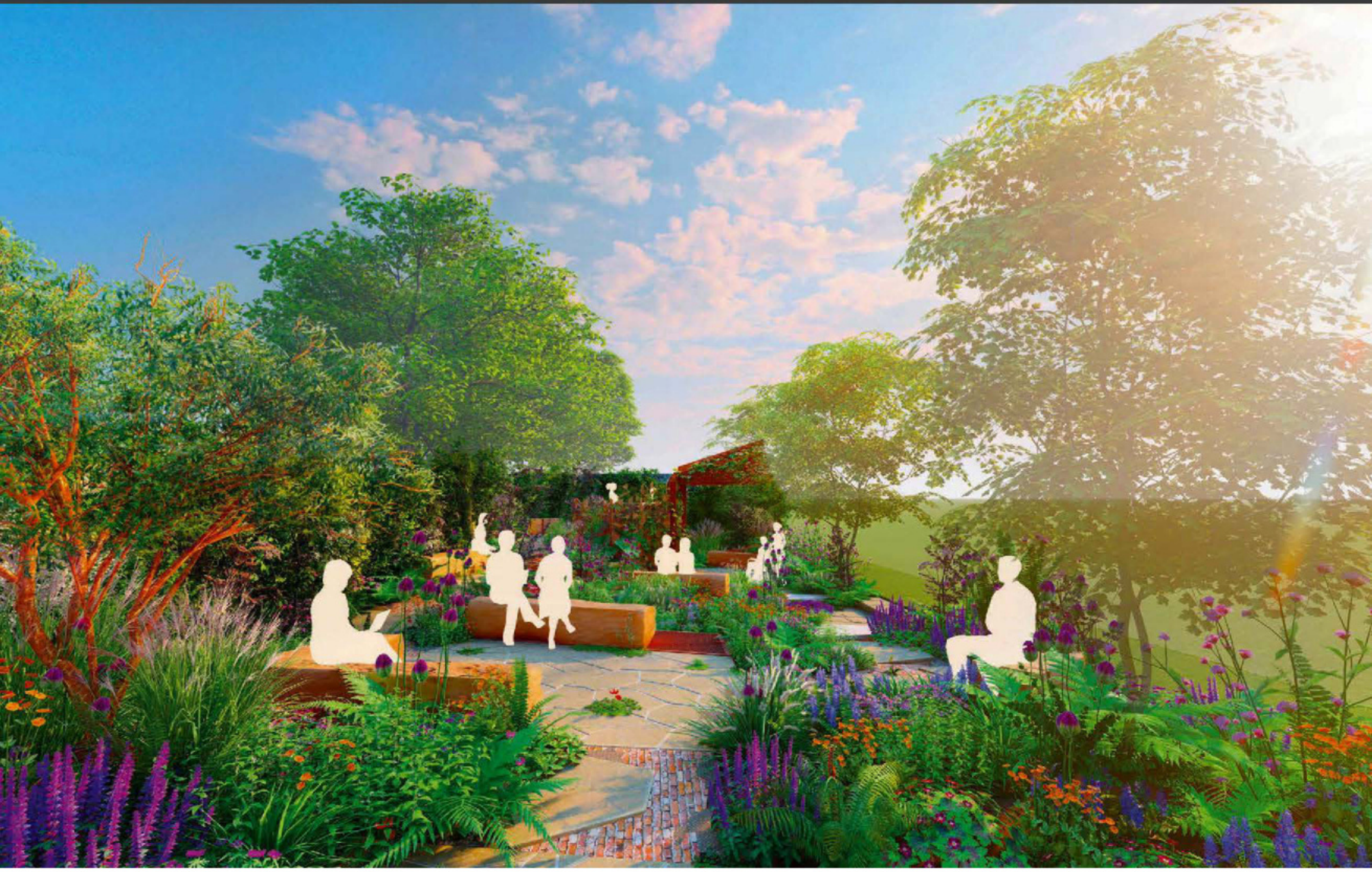
1 **A rainwater harvesting pavilion** is the garden's main feature and was fabricated by Cake Industries (cakeindustries.co.uk) supported by Mule Studio (mule.studio) especially for the show.

2 **Beech timber seats** have been designed for the space in collaboration with woodworker Sebastian Cox (sebastiancox.co.uk); the monolithic structures will add a sculptural element to the space as well as a place to sit.

3 **Swales and channels** set around the garden keep water within the landscape and will be planted up with aquatic and marginal plants.

4 **Three large alder trees**, chosen because they can survive when submerged in water, rise from the landscape around the pavilion. Their toleration of flood conditions links the garden back to WaterAid's work around the world.

5 **Permeable design** Every surface of the garden is designed to be permeable and allow water to pass through, including the metal decking under which plants, water and wildlife can travel.



The Octavia Hill Garden

Designer Ann-Marie Powell.

Sponsors Blue Diamond with The National Trust.

Theme A colourful community garden for people and wildlife on an old brownfield site.

Contractors The Landscaping Consultants; soft landscaping by Location Landscapes.

Plants Hortus Loci.

After the show Blue Diamond's Bridgemere Show Gardens, Cheshire.

Contact ann-mariepowell.com

- Find out more about Ann-Marie's garden in our *Talking Gardens* podcast, available from mid May.

What would Octavia do? That's the question Ann-Marie Powell asked herself in October 2022, when the National Trust chose her to create an exuberant, contemporary show garden inspired by Octavia Hill (1838-1912), a founder of the charity. "She was a pioneer – a forward-thinking, energetic, positive, amazing woman who was leaps and bounds ahead of her time," says Ann-Marie. "Way back in the late 19th century, she was championing green space for heart and mind for people who needed it."

With this in mind, the scheme is a community garden created for an urban brownfield site, providing a place for people to come together and experience nature, as well as boost biodiversity in the city. Built around the concept of 'open-air sitting rooms', it features seating areas with views across colourful, bright, pollinator-friendly planting, including foxgloves and geraniums.

The main focal point is a large metal canopy – the one element keeping Ann-Marie up at night. "The structure is completely without foundations, so we are not using any concrete in the sub-base – it is cantilevered. There's a canopy for shade and we're going to grow climbers up it for wildlife habitat." It's an adventurous garden in other ways too, being split-level, with sloping paths accessible for wheelchair users or parents with a buggy, and it also features audio experiences for the visually impaired.

Ann-Marie returns to the show after a hiatus of eight years. "I've done Chelsea before but never had a large show garden, so that makes me nervous," she admits. "I hope that if Octavia were alive today she would give our ideas a big tick."

5 KEY ELEMENTS

1 **A steel-lattice canopy** Designed in the pattern of a dragonfly wing by architect Giles Jollands (jollands.com) and fabricated in recyclable steel by Richard Weaver (richardweavermetalsmith.co.uk), the self-supporting structure offers shade and operates as a habitat for wildlife.

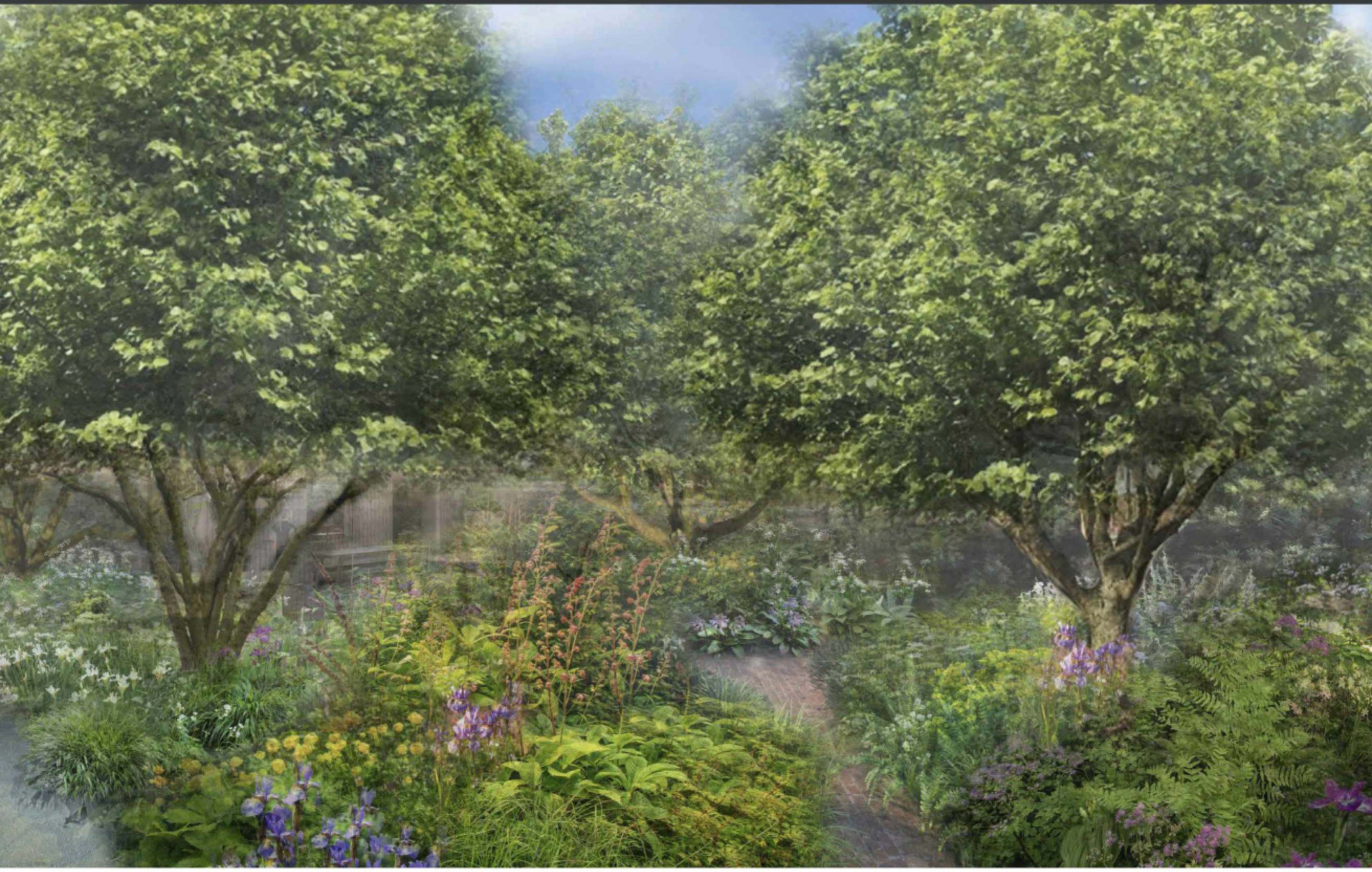
2 **Hand-carved wooden seating** Created by master carver Kate Hanrahan (@kate_hananrahan_carver) from storm-fallen oak from National Trust woodlands.

3 **Wildlife features** Ann-Marie has designed both a contemporary wildlife pond and 'walkable' stream, which provides a gentle sound of running water, as well as bird boxes in the trees.

4 **Secret edimentals** The planting includes good-looking edible plants that have been chosen for wildlife and foraging possibilities. They form just one part of Ann-Marie's vibrant, adaptable, resilient community of plants.

5 **Reclaimed materials** Brick, stone and timber sourced from National Trust properties around the UK are being used throughout the garden in what Ann-Marie describes as a giant jigsaw.

PORTRAIT CHARLIE HOPKINSON



The National Garden Scheme Garden

Designer Tom Stuart-Smith.

Sponsor Project Giving Back for the National Garden Scheme.

Theme A calming woodland glade that embodies the sharing ethos of the National Garden Scheme.

Contractor Crocus.

Plants Crocus with contributions from 12 NGS gardens.

After the show Maggie's Centre, Addenbrooke's Hospital, Cambridge.

Crocus and the NGS will host a plant sale of a wide selection of the show garden's perennials at Chilworth Manor, Surrey, on 1 June to raise further funds for the NGS.

Contact tomstuartsmith.co.uk

The garden celebrates the near 100 years of the National Garden Scheme (NGS) and its fund-raising, open-garden activities. For multi-award winning designer Tom Stuart-Smith, there's a particular resonance here, having opened his own garden, Serge Hill, for the NGS for 30 years. "We love opening the garden," says Tom. "It's a great moment when all the neighbours come together and help, and we all love sharing the garden with visitors."

Tom's Chelsea garden, his first on Main Avenue for ten years, shares a similar generosity of spirit, drawing together contributions from artisans and growers to bring to life this edge-of-woodland space. "We shared a draft of the initial plant list with the NGS's county organisers, who contacted garden owners. We were keen to collect plants from a variety of gardens across the country," explains Tom. Twelve gardens have grown contributions, including rarities such as *Convallaria majalis* 'Hardwick Hall' and *Blechnum penna-marina* (Falkland Island form).

Entering the garden, a path of dry-laid stone setts weaves through open hazel coppice underplanted with woodland species selected to cope with uncertain climatic conditions. At the back you reach a terrace and garden shed, the ideal spot for a slice of NGS Open Garden cake (flourless chocolate cake is a Serge Hill favourite). When the garden is relocated to the planned Maggie's Centre at Addenbrooke's Hospital, this winding path through planting will allow patients to leave the hospital behind them before accessing the support and expertise offered by the cancer-care charity Maggie's – itself supported by NGS donations.

5 KEY ELEMENTS

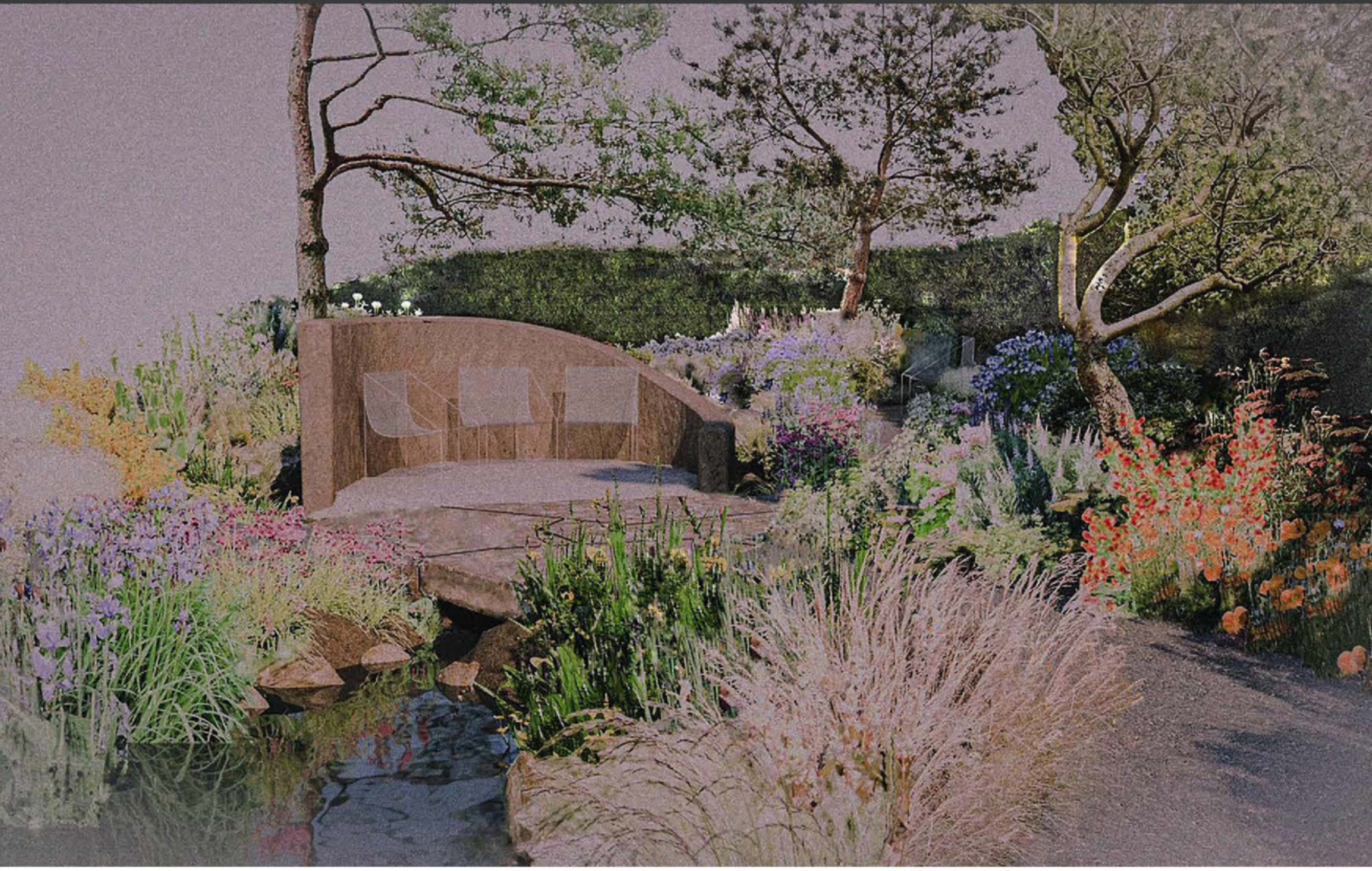
1 **The gardeners' shed at the back of the garden**. Designed by Tom's architect son Ben Stuart-Smith (okrastudio.com) and built by craftsman Fenton Fielder (@redleif_design), it uses traditional techniques and materials such as cleft oak cladding and oak shingles.

2 **Garden boundaries** made of hawthorn, hornbeam, dogwood and Cornelian cherries offer forage and habitat for wildlife. The front of the garden will be edged with chestnut posts and hazel rods.

3 **The shed guttering**, made by potter Robert Silver (robertsilverpottery.co.uk) is based on the traditional terracotta gutters seen in Sicily, but creating pieces more resistant to temperatures in the UK.

4 **Rare garden plants,** including *Begonia palmata*, *Disporopsis aspersa* and yellow-flowered *Saruma henryi*, many of which will be sold for the NGS after the show.

5 **Garden tools inside the shed** have been rescued and restored by horticultural therapy charity Sunnyside Rural Trust (sunnysideruraltrust.org.uk), as part of its tool-repair workshop for young people and adults with learning disabilities.



Stroke Association's Garden for Recovery

Designer Miria Harris.

Sponsor Project Giving Back for the Stroke Association.

Theme A tranquil, sensory space for those recovering from stroke.

Contractor Landform Consultants.

Plants Kelways; Deepdale Trees.

After the show The garden will relocate to the Stroke Unit at Chapel Allerton Hospital in Leeds.

Contact miriaharris.com

- Find out more about Miria's garden in her *Talking Gardens* podcast episode, available from 19 May.

As a stroke survivor herself, Miria Harris focused her show garden design on how it could support the recovery process. "What a lot of survivors find difficult is cluttered, busy environments. And gardens can be quite busy," she explains. "So the use of colour is a grounding element; something that will support movement through the garden, soft wayfinding and a calming experience." She has used complementary colours in blocks in her scheme, including pink, orange, yellow, purple and green, with flowers such as wallflowers, honesty and bronze fennel.

There are different routes through the garden, with accessible, interconnected pathways, which meet at a series of resting places with seats by emerging furniture designer Olivia Gonsalves. "It's a contoured landscape, emblematic of recovery, which has its ups and downs. You can stop and sit, take a breath and just be in the garden. It's a peaceful space to connect with nature and experience the incredible wellbeing that comes with that connection."

Among the key features of the garden are the sculptural, twisted *Pinus sylvestris* and *Pinus mugo* trees. "These trees have been exposed to harsh elements, but stayed where they are, and that is symbolic of resilience and the message that you can move forward from this trauma. I didn't want any strong architectural elements in the garden, so instead it's the trees that frame different views."

Miria is most excited, and apprehensive, about her pond with puddled clay base. "It's going to be a challenge. None of the plants are in plastic baskets; they're going on to shelves within the formed pond. We're going to be very muddy for the build up!"

5 KEY ELEMENTS

1 Characterful trees Miria found her knarled pine trees in a field of old, rejected and previously ill trees that had been nursed back to health at nursery Deepdale Trees.

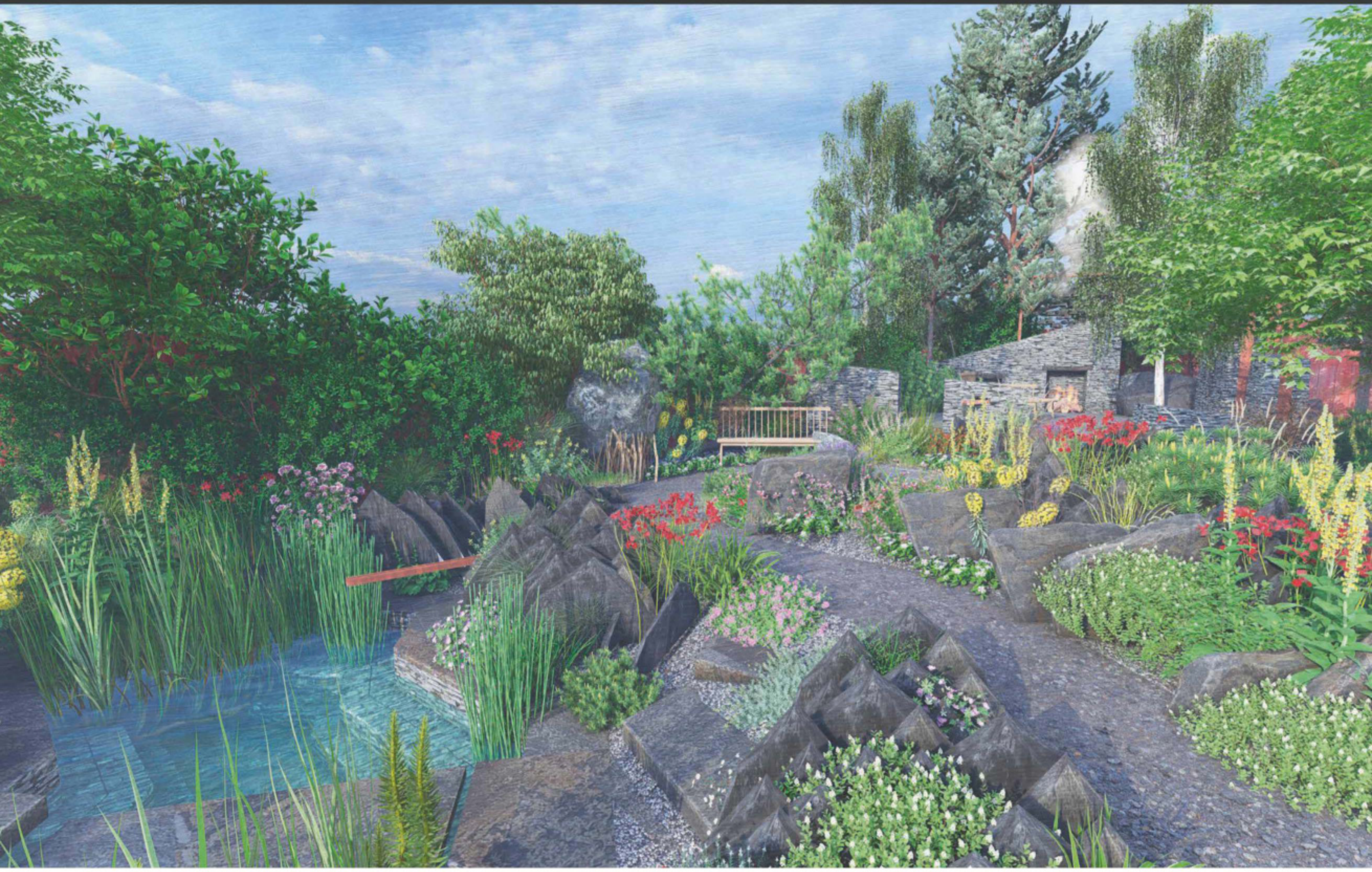
2 Liner-less pond The puddled clay pond, which is a risky choice for Chelsea, will have a base packed hard with machinery, and kept clear with the aid of flocculants.

3 Colour-block planting Inspired by Gertrude Jekyll's use and theories on colour. Miria has planted the garden in blocks of complementary colours to help ease a stroke survivor's navigation of the space.

4 The bridge A metaphor for the mental, physical and emotional connections that have to be rebuilt after a stroke. Drainage gaps in the design ensure surface water runs off into the stream below.

5 Sustainable materials The garden is cement free and features hempblocks for the lime-rendered walls, hemp-and-waste-composite paving and corrugated Hempfibre panels to clad boundaries. Recycled materials are used for the seating, substrate and foundations.

PORTRAIT RACHEL WARNE



The Bridge to 2030 Garden

Designer Matthew Childs.

Sponsor Project Giving Back for the Terrence Higgins Trust.

Theme A quarry in the landscape of North Wales, referencing the 1980s AIDS: Monolith advert.

Contractor Yoreland Design Ltd.

Plants Hortus Loci, Beth Chatto Plants, Tony Heaney.

After the show Croydon Sexual Health Centre.

Contact matthewchildsdesign.co.uk, @matthewchildsdesign

"My priority is to get behind the message of a show garden, and then add a touch of theatre and magic to ensure we engage and grab attention – and this garden has that in spades," says designer Matthew Childs of his garden for HIV charity Terrence Higgins Trust. This is Matthew's second Chelsea garden – a decade on from his first – and the message is a strong one. "We're highlighting the charity's 2030 vision: that by 2030 there are no new HIV cases, people with HIV live well, and there's good sexual health for all."

The garden's setting is reminiscent of a rejuvenated quarry landscape in North Wales, which is partly inspired by the 1980s AIDS awareness campaign that featured a monolithic tombstone. From this fearful place, he looked at how plants can reshape a harsh, wasteland landscape. "It's a beautiful metaphor for the resilience of the HIV story but also as horticulturists and gardeners, it feeds into how our gardens need to cope with changing climates."

From a sunken pool at the front, the garden's contours rise to an area of scree – typical of the free-draining, rocky conditions found in a quarry – planted with small, alpine treasures, such as *Raoulia subsericea* and *Sisyrinchium* 'Quaint and Queer', strewn amid rocks and crevices. The garden continues up to a terrace with a dry-stone-walled shelter that uses reclaimed and by-product stone and is enclosed by lush planting and trees. "I'm looking forward to the hands-on experience of this garden. Quite a lot is being created by artisans on site – going back to traditional skills such as woodworking and stone masonry. It's very exciting."

5 KEY ELEMENTS

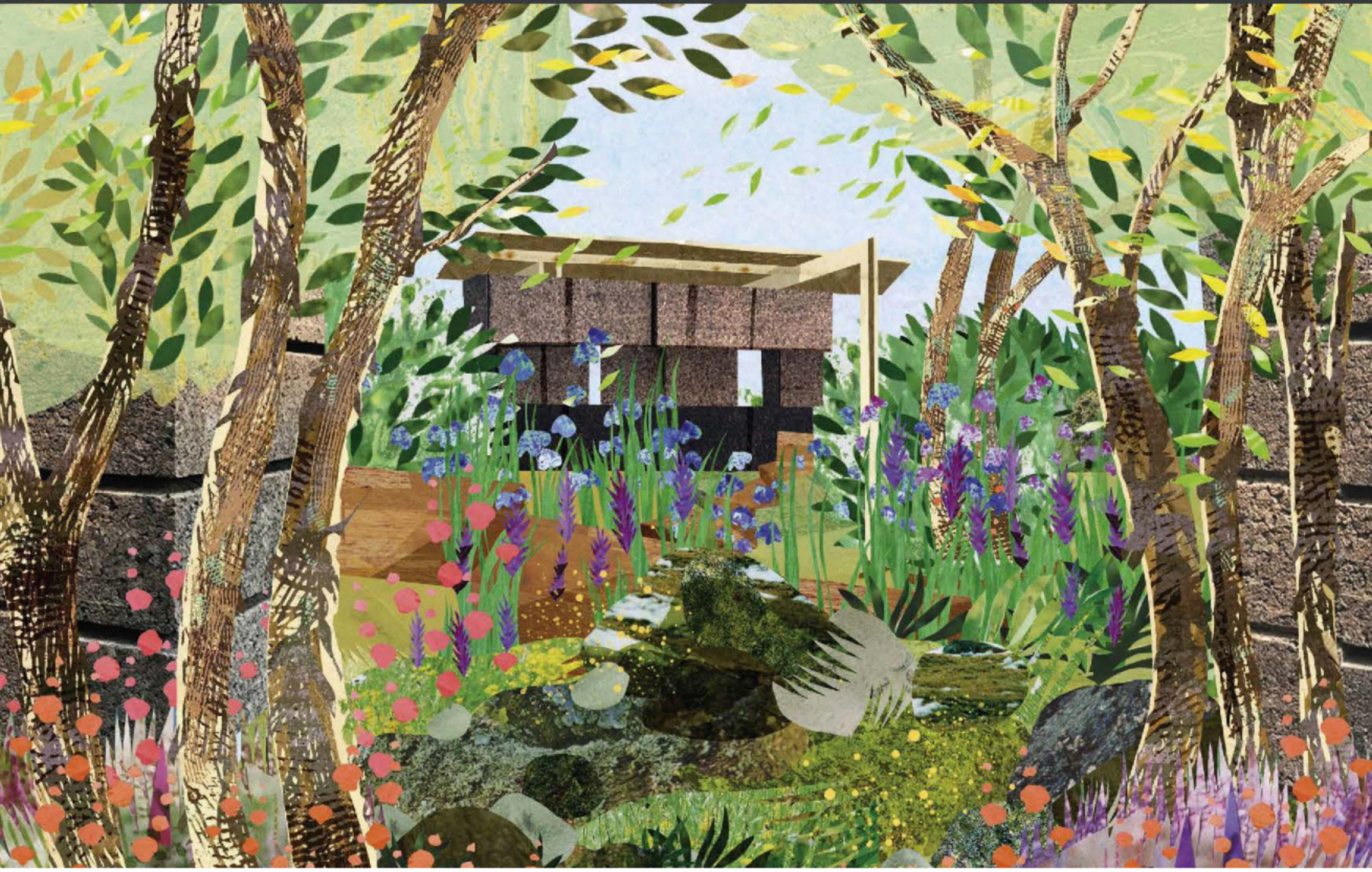
1 **Tombstone crossing** The water in the pool rises and falls. As it recedes, a tombstone-like, slate monolith is revealed – representative of the fear and stigma felt in the 1980s – creating a bridge into the garden and a more hopeful future.

2 **Crevice gardening** is a key feature of Matthew's garden, showcasing how waste substrate can be used to create distinct planting environments, and highlighting some unusual alpines.

3 **Stick furniture** designed by Swyn Anwyl Williams (swynanwyl.com) from North Wales as a contemporary take on traditional Welsh stick furniture.

4 **A large precariously balanced boulder,** which is seemingly supported by fragile sticks – an analogy for those people lost to HIV.

5 **Endangered plants** *Cotoneaster* is a resilient plant often found growing on cliff faces, but the critically endangered Welsh sub-shrub *Cotoneaster cambricus* had dwindled to just six remaining plants by the 1970s; conservation means there are now more than 100 in the wild.



National Autistic Society Garden

Designers Sophie Parmenter and Dido Milne.

Sponsor Project Giving Back for the National Autistic Society.

Theme A garden designed to capture an autistic person's everyday experience of the world.

Contractor Landform Consultants.

Plants Many independent growers including Kelways, Beth Chatto's Plants, Highland Moss and Hare Spring Cottage Plants.

After the show Catrine Bank, a National Autistic Society supported-living site in Scotland.

Contact sophieparmenter.co.uk; cskarchitects.co.uk

The aim of garden designer Sophie Parmenter and architect Dido Milne's design for The National Autistic Society garden is to capture an autistic person's everyday experience of the world, specifically the idea of masking. "Masking is the process by which autistic people might suppress autistic traits or mimic other so-called 'normal' traits to fit in better," says Sophie.

Sophie quickly realised that bark, as the protective layer around a tree, was a lovely metaphor for masking, and this is used around the space both in the hard landscaping and the planting.

Expanded cork walls, which are narrower at the bottom and broaden towards the top, obscure the garden's centre. "This inner sanctum is where the autistic person can be their authentic self," says Dido. It will be filled with moss-covered stones, interplanted with ferns and jewel-like flowers to create a calming atmosphere.

"There are as many different ways of being autistic as there are autistic people," Sophie explains. "So there will be a corner of this garden for everybody." Three outer gardens are representative of the different relationships in people's lives. One will be a wetland meadow area with low-level planting including grasses and bog myrtle with yellow highlights from primulas and *Salix viminalis*. In the second outer garden, the planting will be a shrubbier mix filled with the red stems of *Cornus*. In the final zone, drifts of camassias frame the pathway leading into the central dell.

Although it wasn't conceived as an edible garden, edible plants such as blueberries and Japanese plum have been included. "It's inadvertently turned into something of a food forest," says Sophie.

5 KEY ELEMENTS

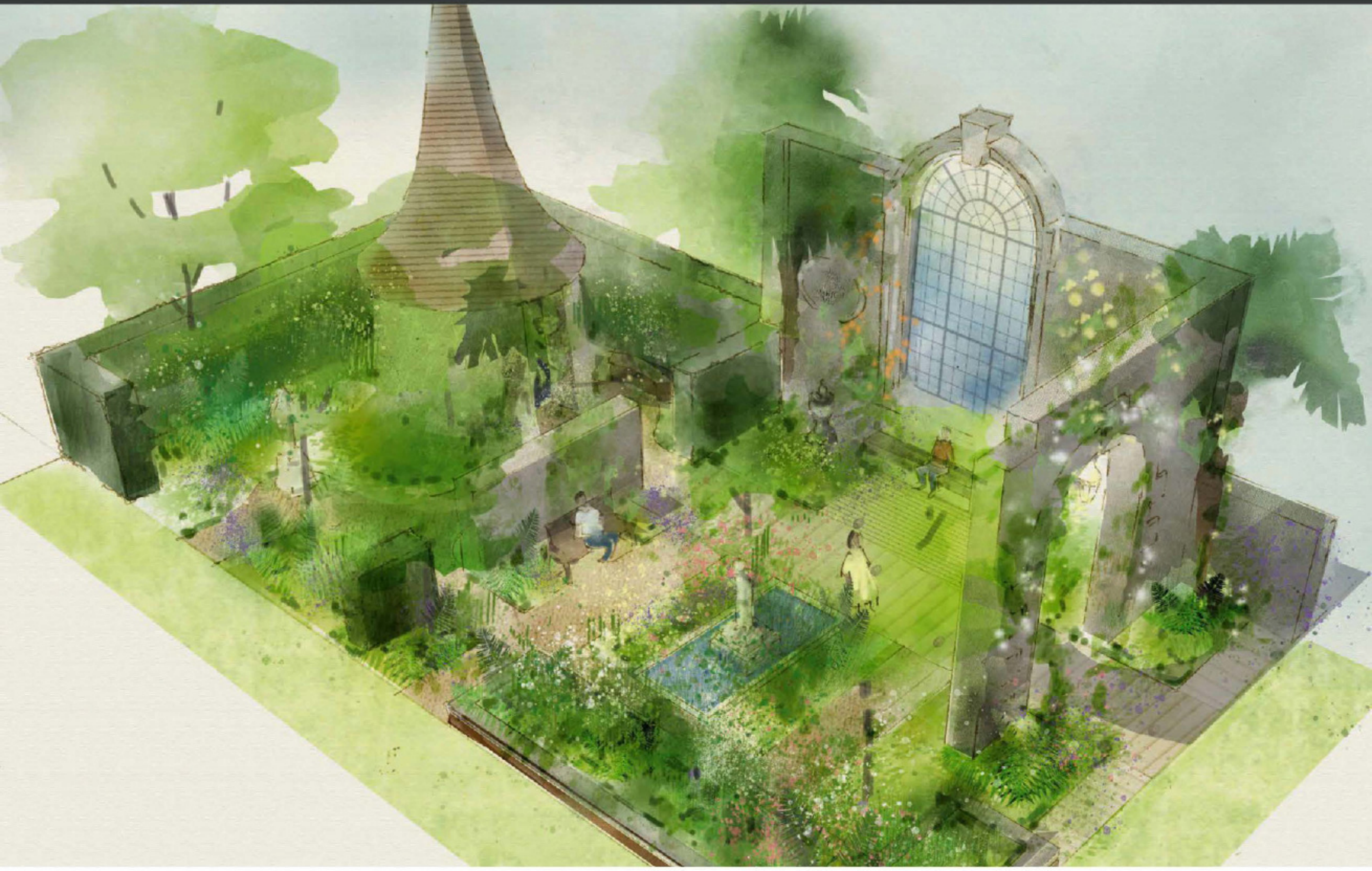
1 **A kinetic moving sculpture** by Robert Moore (kineticsculptures.co.uk) that represents the complexity and beauty of the autistic mind.

2 **Expanded cork walls** will provide a soft acoustic to the garden. They're created from waste and by-products from cork forestry that could be returned to the earth.

3 **Canopies reaching out from the expanded cork walls** are made up of overlapping aluminium panels, coloured with plant dyes, which form natural waterfalls. The largest of these, the Family Pavilion roof, has water pumped over it that will run along a rain chain into the mossy dell at the heart of the garden.

4 **Different places to sit,** including two seats either side of a gap in the wall. Almost like a confessional booth, this seating allows people to converse in a low-pressure environment.

5 **A range of mosses at the heart of the garden** will give the centre a fairy-tale-like character. "Those tiny little structures are the sort of plants people would probably miss when they walk past in their everyday lives," says Sophie.



St James's Piccadilly Garden

Designer Robert Myers.

Sponsor Project Giving Back for St James's Piccadilly.

Theme An urban pocket park with characterful woodland-style planting that enhances the space around a central London church.

Contractor Stewart Landscape Construction.

Plants Hortus Loci and Deepdale Trees.

After the show Many of the materials and plants will go to St James's Piccadilly, with other plants going to partner church St Pancras Church on London's Euston Road.

Contact robertmyers-associates.co.uk

PORTRAIT RUTH INGRAM; VISUALISATION MICHELLE ANDERSON

Six-time RHS Chelsea Gold medallist Robert Myers returns with 'Imagine the World to be Different', a depiction of the restored garden planned for St James's Piccadilly church in London. The Wren Project involves wider restoration to the 17th-century, Christopher Wren-designed church, as well as opening up entrances to the precinct and creating new opportunities. "It's about making the whole church and garden more inclusive and accessible, creating more biodiversity and making connections between the church and surrounding spaces," says Robert, who has been working with architects Ptolemy Dean at St James's for years.

The garden references that project but also highlights the church's history and connections to free thinkers such as Wren, and its current outreach work and activities around social and environmental justice. An archway faced in reclaimed brick and backed by strocks – blocks of unfired clay-rich earth and straw, which are then lime rendered – draws visitors into the garden, lush with semi-shaded planting, shrubs, climbers, a water feature and an urn from the churchyard itself. Moving further up, you reach more woodland-style planting – St James's churchyard is shadowed by huge London plane trees – where you'll find a characterful wooden cabin. Designed to replace St James's Drop-in and Counselling Service caravan, this cabin offers a destination of hope and wellbeing in the garden. "I got excited by the idea of pocket parks – richly planted, important, regenerative and restorative green spaces that can offer a new sort of identity – that's really relevant to our narrative here," says Robert.

5 KEY ELEMENTS

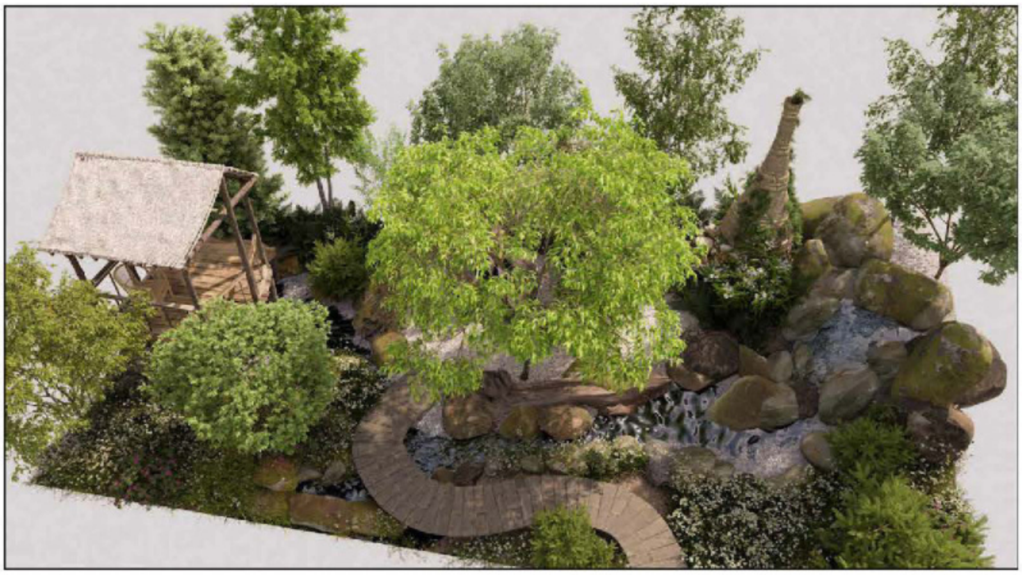
1 Counselling cabin Designed by installation artist Ivan Morison (peakmorison.org) as an enclosed, safe space, it's made of oak and chestnut for a sense of warmth and softness and will be relocated to St James's after the show.

2 Wall plaques and engraved stones will bring to light some of the key historic free thinkers associated with St James's including poet William Blake, abolitionist Quobna Ottobah Cugoano, and botanical artist Mary Delany.

3 Resilient trees were chosen to withstand the harsh urban environment as well as taking climate resilience into account, including *Ginkgo biloba*, *Koelreuteria paniculata* and *Trachycarpus fortunei*.

4 Church window The large, arched window in the garden's boundary wall echoes the distinctive windows of Christopher Wren's 1684 church.

5 Plant-covered walls including the unusual climber *Stauntonia latifolia*, the sausage vine, with its glossy, evergreen leaves, clusters of flowers and sausage-like fruits, perfectly suited to the sheltered location of the churchyard.



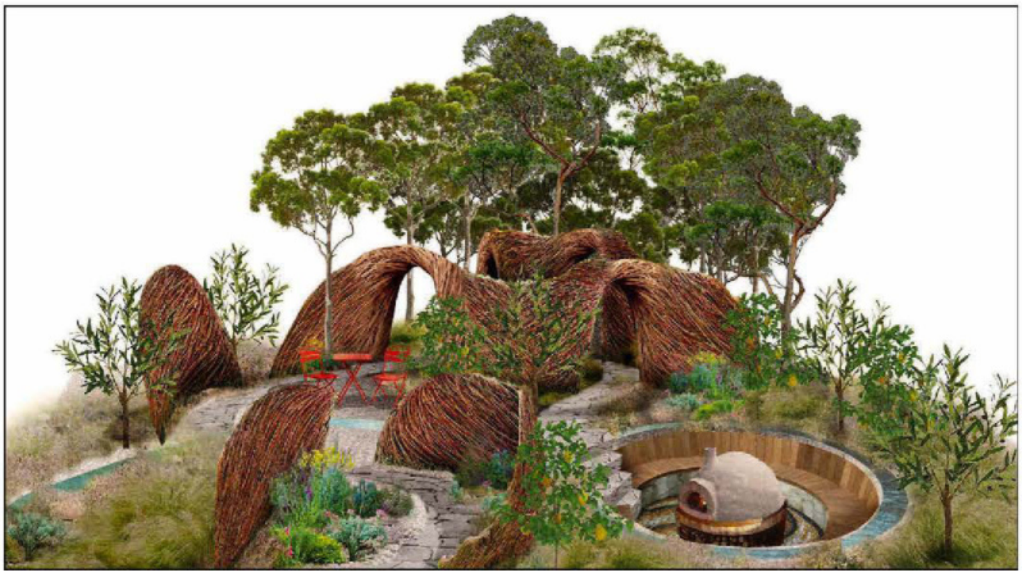
Designer Helen Olney.
Sponsors Burma Skincare Initiative and Sanofi, British Dermatological Nursing Group, No.7 Beauty Company.
Theme The landscape of Myanmar.
Contractor Conquest Creative Spaces.
Contact helenolney.com

The Burma Skincare Initiative Garden

Helen Olney's first ever show garden is a collaboration between clinicians in the UK and the charity Burma Skincare Initiative. The garden has a naturalistic, tranquil feel with a waterfall flowing over moss-covered rocks into a stream that runs past a ruined *stupa* – a traditional spiritual structure found in Myanmar (previously known as Burma). Above a pond, planted with *Nymphaea alba,* a rustic stilt house offers views across the garden.

The garden is a celebration of the work done by the charity to provide excellent dermatological care to the people of Myanmar, and reclaimed materials, including crumbling red bricks and weathered stone, create layers of texture to demonstrate the lived experiences of people with skin diseases.

"The most challenging element has been the planting," says Helen, "to find a palette of plants that are found in Burma and will also grow in the UK." The naturalistic planting includes *Acer davidii*, *Anemone rivularis* and *Selinum wallichianum*, and will provide food and shelter for wildlife at Dulwich College, where the garden will be relocated after the show as part of a wild area development.



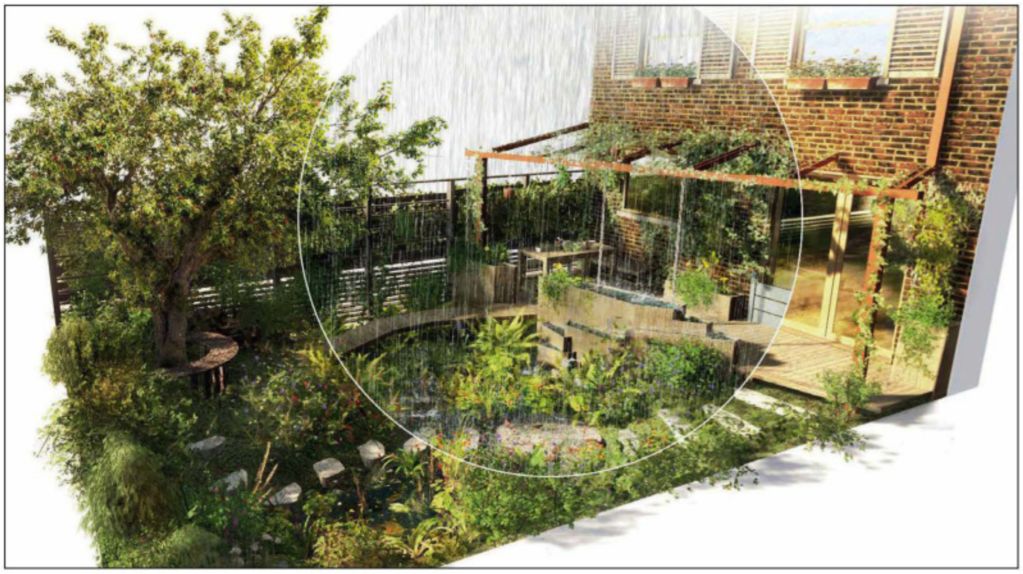
Designers John Warland and Emma O'Connell.
Sponsor Project Giving Back for Freedom from Torture.
Theme A restorative space for survivors of torture.
Contractor Living Landscapes.
Contact emmaoconnell.com

The Freedom From Torture Garden

Inspired by the horticultural therapy sessions held at the Freedom from Torture (FFT) headquarters in London, where it will be relocated, this garden by designers John Warland and Emma O'Connell will be a space of sanctuary and restoration for torture survivors. "Gardens are for people and the focal point will be the sunken seating area and handmade clay oven," says John. "A place for survivors to relax, share and break bread together."

The arid landscape features sculptural willow waves that create zones for reflection while a sinuous water rill offers both irrigation and a soothing sound. The planting is naturalistic and inspired by the native flora found in the homelands of some of the FFT survivors, including figs and pomegranates. All of the planting, from Beth Chatto's Plants, is drought tolerant and adapted to low-fertility soils.

Every element of the garden is bespoke and there is potential for variations in the end results; the willow's colour could be anything from fresh green to deep red, depending on the weather. "We also hope to have a river of poppies running through the gravelled areas," says John, "but one downpour and their flowers will be gone."



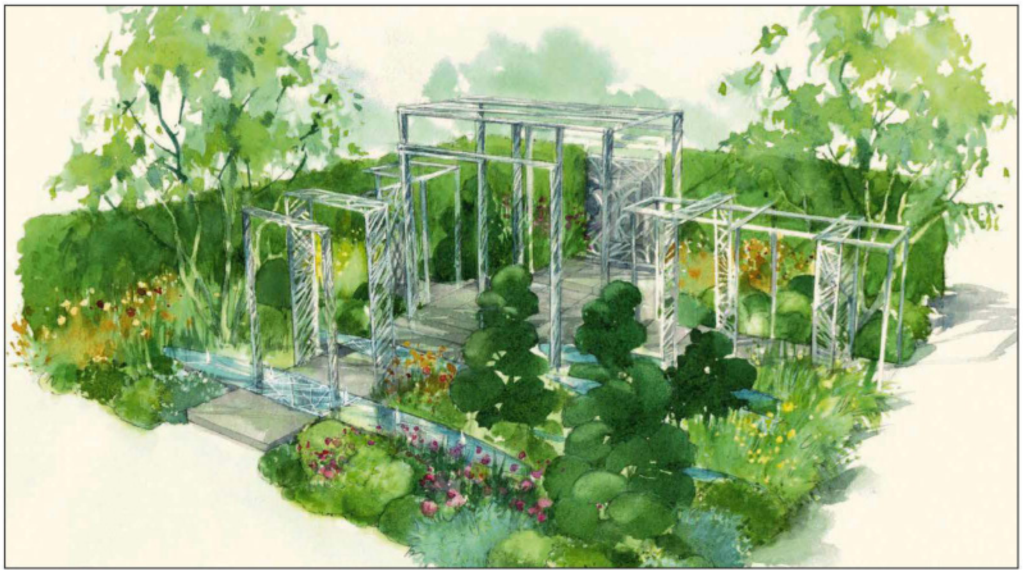
Designers Naomi Slade and Ed Barsley.
Sponsor Flood Re.
Theme Mitigating the effects of flooding in family homes.
Contractors Belderbos Landscapes, in association with Water Artisans.
Contact floodre.co.uk

The Flood Resilient Garden

Flood risk and mitigation are central themes to Naomi Slade and Ed Barsley's garden, which is modelled on a domestic family garden. "The garden is designed to be inviting, immersive and relatable," says Naomi. "While at the same time it is full of ideas for managing heavy rainfall and coping with flooding." These include dense planting which slows water flow and methods of water capture and storage.

One in four homes in the UK is at risk of flooding and the garden aims to show people how they can make their gardens more resilient. The pond is designed to rise and fall, and a large water feature created using vintage galvanised tanks doubles as ornamental pool and water storage. Tough moisture-loving plants, including ferns and pollarded willows feature heavily, and a large quince tree provides a focal point.

"Our garden highlights the importance of seeing water as a resource rather than a threat," says Ed. A swale running through the space becomes a stream, carrying water into the pond. Rain chains carry water from the house into storage tanks and a raised bridge allows for movement through the garden in wet weather. It is a challenging design, but one they're looking forward to building.



Designer Catherine MacDonald.
Sponsor Boodles.
Theme A celebration of art for The National Gallery.
Contractor Gadd Brothers Trees & Landscapes.
Contact landformconsultants.co.uk

The Boodles Garden

"Art and gardens have been linked for millennia," says designer Catherine MacDonald, whose painterly garden celebrates the bicentennial of The National Gallery. Catherine's aim was to "paint with plants," recreating aspects of pointillism and impressionism through the use of plant forms and textures to emulate brushstrokes in paintings by Georges Seurat and Claude Monet.

Starting with a palette of greens, inspired by Monet's *The Water-Lily Pond*, warm tones from *Dahlia* 'Franz Kafka' and *Geum* 'Totally Tangerine' wind through the space, adding highlights in between grasses and white umbels. "We wanted to create a real sense of joy and we hope to achieve this with the bold, jewel-rich tones," she says.

Taxus baccata topiary are stars of the show, emulating trees found in works by Van Gogh or Cezanne, while sculptural arches provide perspective. Textured metal water features run through the space, playing with light and reflections, and adding to the painterly qualities. Catherine is excited to see this collaborative effort come together. "There's nothing more wonderful than stepping back, when no more can be done, and feeling that sense of shared achievement."

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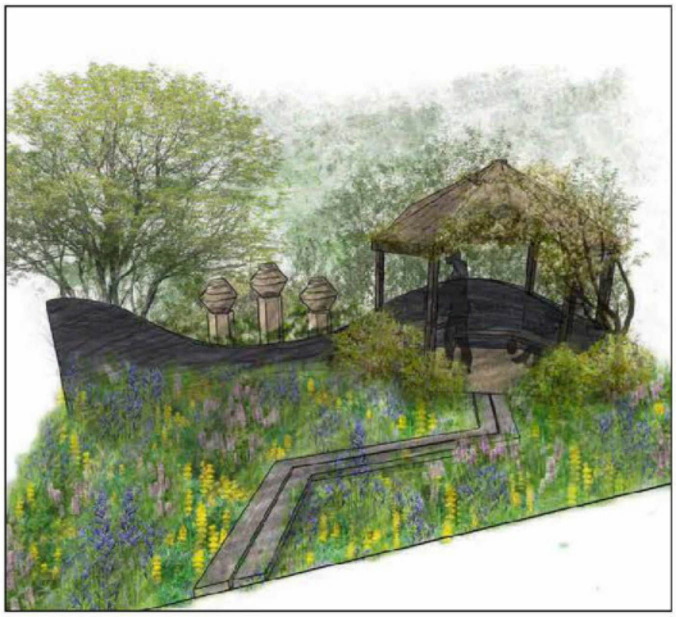
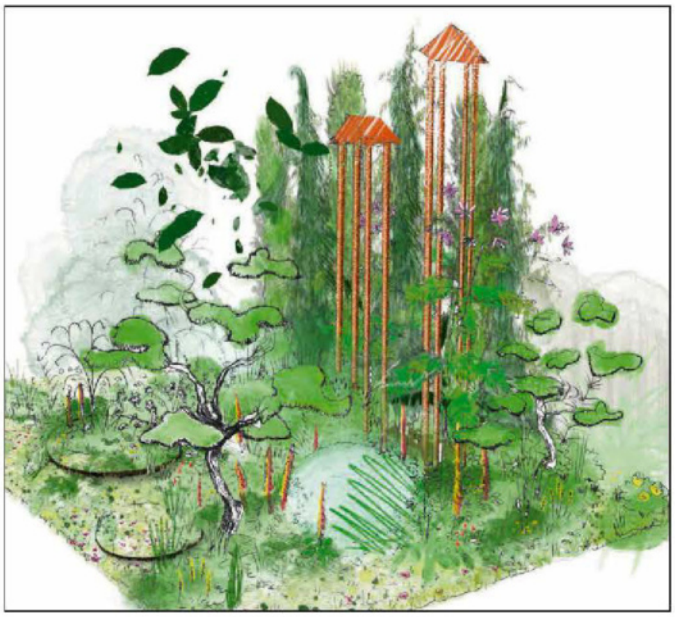


Bowel Research UK Microbiome Garden

Designers	Chris Hull and Sid Hill.
Sponsor	Project Giving Back for Bowel Research UK.
Theme	Gardening for gut health.
Contractor	Atlantes Landscapes.
Contact	greenbooklandscapedesign.co.uk; sidhillecogardens.com

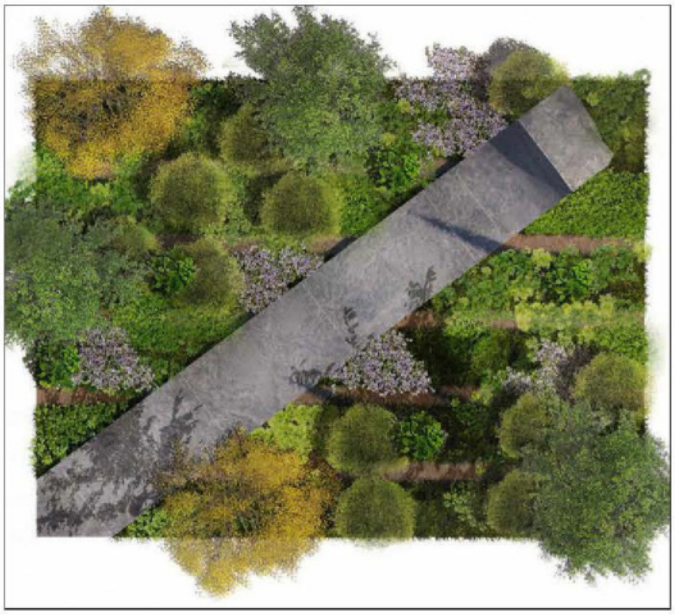
This collaborative design from Chris Hull and Sid Hill champions the importance of the gut microbiome and the science that shows cultivating plants in ecologically rich environments fosters a diverse microbial community that promotes a healthy bowel and overall wellbeing. Their design features a serpentine charred-oak wall that will run through the space, and a hexagonal shelter looking out on a wildflower meadow full of edible plants, including *Bistorta officinalis*, *Camassia quamash* and *Lupinus luteus*, that offer a probiotic feast. "We are really excited about bringing a pioneering edible meadow to RHS Chelsea for the first time," they say.



The Size of Wales Garden

Designer	Dan Bristow.
Sponsor	Project Giving Back for Size of Wales.
Theme	The diversity of flora in tropical forests.
Contractor	Mark Wallinger.
Contact	studiobristow.com

Dan Bristow's design for the charity on a mission to sustain an area of tropical forest at least the size of Wales (two million hectares) uses 313 plant species to represent the number of different tree species that can occur in a single hectare of tropical forest, and aims to be one of the most biodiverse in Chelsea's history. "The garden will immerse visitors in a detailed dream-like landscape featuring plant species that belong in our temperate climate here in the UK," says Dan. "Floating discs of plants will be suspended above watery voids that represent the barrenness left after deforestation, while small roofs on gangly posts draw to mind the precariousness of our existence." After the show, the garden will be relocated to Treborth Botanic Garden in North Wales.



Planet Good Earth

Designers	Betongpark and Urban Organic.
Theme	Edible and skateable landscapes.
Sponsor	Project Giving Back for Planet Good Earth CIC.
Contractors	Betongpark and Urban Organic.
Contact	betongpark.co.uk; urban-organic.co.uk

Inspired by urban foraging and skating in city plazas, the Planet Good Earth garden is a collaboration between skatepark design experts Betongpark and city agriculturists Urban Organic. With a granite skate ramp at its heart to encourage physical activity, the garden will celebrate community spaces, and provide food for local people and habitats for wildlife when it is relocated to Hay-on-Wye after the show. A canopy of fruit trees, including plums, apples and mulberries will be planted with soft fruits, perennials and climbers surrounding them. Everything will be underplanted with a groundcover of strawberries, mint, chamomile, salads and herbs. Other features include hydroponic grow towers and hanging mushroom sacks.

IS CHELSEA SUSTAINABLE?

Events on the scale of the Chelsea Flower Show are bound to come at an environmental cost. So what is the RHS doing to make the show more sustainable?

WORDS **JODIE JONES**

When the RHS Chelsea Flower Show 2024 opens its gates to the public on 21 May, the eyes of the gardening world will be drawn to the grounds of the Royal Hospital, just as they have been for more than a century. But, largely hidden from sight, things will be very different this year, because Chelsea 2024 is promised to be the greenest show ever.

"This is an important year for the RHS," says Helena Pettit, RHS director of shows, commercial and innovation, who has been involved in implementing widespread changes behind the scenes. "We had set ourselves a target for becoming net positive for nature and for people by 2030, and sustainability in our shows is a key part of this."

It certainly didn't used to be. Not so long ago, as the last visitor left the showground, the sledgehammers came out, and all those gorgeous gardens were reduced to rubble, and consigned to a procession of skips. In fact, as recently as 2021, when the new Balcony Gardens category was introduced, each designer was presented with a freshly constructed plinth of breeze blocks and render to work from, which was discarded at the end of the show.

But 2021 also saw the launch of the RHS Sustainability Strategy, and since then there has been a marked shift in attitude. In the run-up to Chelsea 2023, all Show and Sanctuary garden designers were asked, voluntarily, to audit the carbon footprint of implementing their plans. Sarah Price was already preparing her exquisite Nurture Landscapes garden when she received the request, but happily embraced the challenge. "It was something I really wanted to do, but I soon discovered that there was no reliable data on which to base a calculation. If I were building a road or a house, it would have been easy, but there was nothing about planting a tree from Germany or laying concrete foundations in a garden."

Her solution was to work with recycled or recyclable materials, sourced along the corridor between her contractor, Crocus, and the showground, to minimise the carbon costs of transportation. "We also used some traditional techniques, such as building walls from straw bales with lime mortar render, but the footings were an innovative system of giant concrete blocks that Crocus has been reusing at the show for a number of years," she says. "Chelsea has always been a showcase, but maybe it is time to change our idea about what is important to showcase." ▷

Designer Sarah Price adopted the mantra 'source locally, reuse and repair' to make her 2023 Nurture Landscapes garden as low carbon and sustainable as possible.

JULIE SKELTON / GAP PHOTOS GARDEN DESIGNED BY SARAH PRICE

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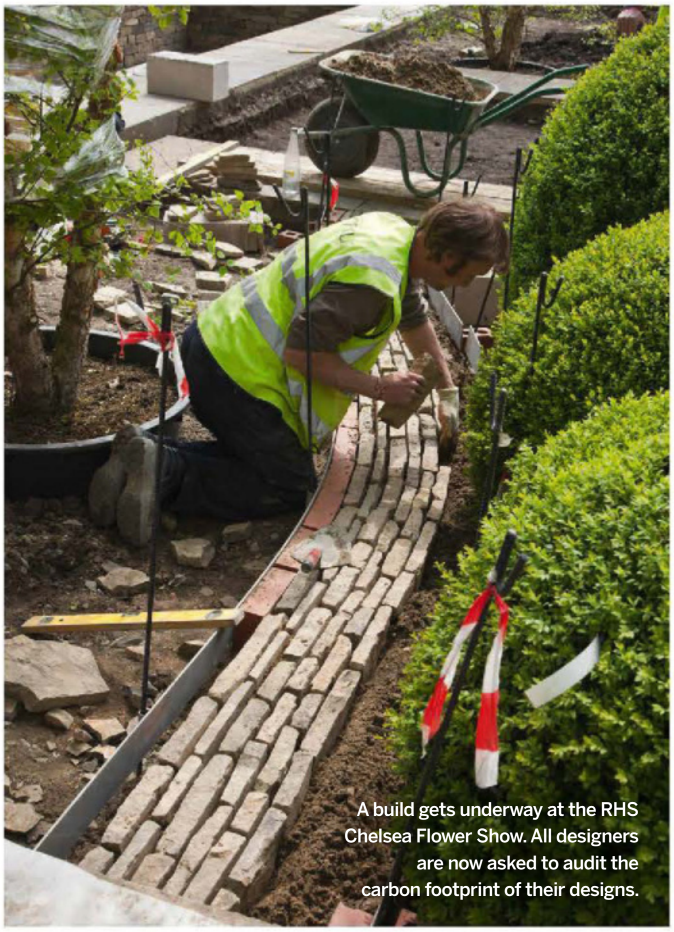
In his 2023 garden for Savills, Mark Gregory used zero cement and repurposed offcuts from the stone paving to create raised vegetable beds.

> “In the old days, there was a lot of waste, and I am probably responsible for putting more plastic down on that showground than anyone else. But I’ve seen a massive shift in attitudes”
>
> MARK GREGORY, RHS LANDSCAPING AMBASSADOR

▷ RHS landscaping ambassador Mark Gregory agrees. He built his first garden at Chelsea in 1988 and has worked there every year since, producing almost 200 gardens. “In the old days, there really was a lot of waste, and I am probably personally responsible for putting more plastic down on that showground than anyone else, ever. But, especially in the past two years, I’ve seen a massive shift in attitudes.”

Last year, Mark designed and built the Savills Plot to Plate garden and, like Sarah, found it impossible to prepare the carbon calculations he was asked to provide. “It was a good idea, but we just didn’t have the necessary information.” He believes it was to the RHS’s credit that it recognised the issue and shifted approach, bringing in the sustainability expertise of design and build company Nicholsons to help develop sustainability judging criteria and facilitate carbon calculations.

Mark, meanwhile, decided to set himself a personal challenge. “I thought I would see if I could make the whole garden without plastic or cement, using as many recycled materials as possible. ▷



A build gets underway at the RHS Chelsea Flower Show. All designers are now asked to audit the carbon footprint of their designs.

SARAH CUTTLE / RHS; JO WHITWORTH / GAP PHOTOS. DESIGNER: TOM STUART-SMITH

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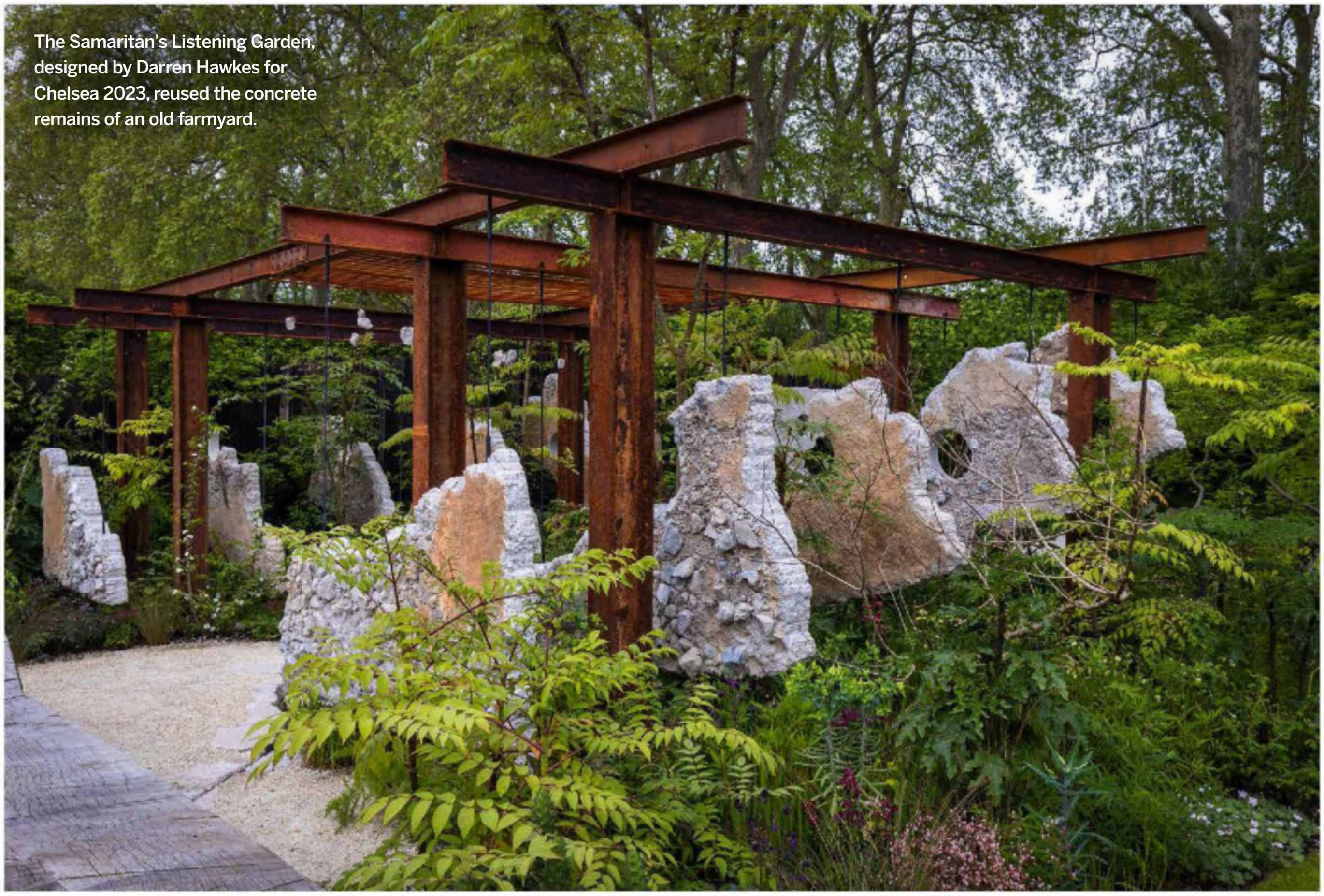

The Samaritan's Listening Garden, designed by Darren Hawkes for Chelsea 2023, reused the concrete remains of an old farmyard.

NEIL HEPWORTH / RHS

> "There was a lot of interest in doing things better, and Chelsea is an amazing showcase to demonstrate what is possible"
>
> MALCOLM ANDERSON,
> RHS SUSTAINABILITY MANAGER

▷ I reused timber offcuts, got roof tiles from Facebook Marketplace and even found some joists being taken out of a chapel. It probably took me an extra 30 days of design work and research, but I enjoyed it, and I was extremely proud of the result. It wasn't carbon neutral, but it was very, very light, and we salvaged and reused every part of the garden afterwards." The experience left him positively evangelical. "I will definitely not use cement at Chelsea again," he says. "I have seen the light and I'm never going back."

RHS sustainability manager Malcolm Anderson acknowledges there are still serious issues to tackle. He has a background in construction and, when he joined the Society in 2021, was surprised to find how far behind that industry the landscaping profession was. "But there was a lot of interest in doing things better, and Chelsea is an amazing showcase to demonstrate what is possible," he says.

"For us, there are three parts to the challenge – the build, show days, and the breakdown – and in all aspects, we are tight for space, resources and time. The flower show is sandwiched between two other events at the Royal Hospital Ground, so everything has to be done quickly, and space is so restricted that even siting extra recycling skips is a challenge. The capacity of the local electrical grid can't meet all our needs without generator backup, and the designers all have limits on the amount of time and money they can spend on their gardens. But we have already made improvements, and there is more to come. It just takes time to turn around an event this big."

Since 2018, the RHS has been working with A Greener Festival to improve sustainability. In 2021 it brought in biofuel generators, run on hydrotreated vegetable oil, to reduce carbon emissions. In 2022 all RHS site utility vehicles were switched to electric, and single-use plastics were banned from RHS operations in 2023 (with a back-of-house ban coming in 2025).

Not all gardens can be relocated in their entirety but this year, for the first time, not only will all eight Show gardens and seven Sanctuary gardens have gone through a preliminary Green Garden Audit to improve their carbon footprint, they will all have a relocation plan in place. There is also a new Environmental Innovation Award up for grabs, which will be presented to one exemplary garden. There are plans to soon ban all cement-based concrete from the showground, and from 2026 onwards, all plants on site will need to be peat free.

Add to this the introduction of vacuum lavatories, which use up to 90 per cent less water than traditional systems, a network of water-refill stations and a significant increase in the availability of plant-based food (which is widely regarded as a lower-carbon way to feed the world), and it is clear that the RHS is taking its self-imposed green challenge very seriously.

Malcolm is pragmatic about the extent to which it can succeed. "A show like this can probably never be sustainable in the strictest sense, but it is an amazing opportunity to showcase what is possible out in the real world." ☐

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BEHIND THE SCENES

The Chelsea Flower Show may be the ultimate garden show, but it takes a lot of dedicated people working hard to bring it to fruition. Here we meet some of them

THE JUDGE

Tamsin Westhorpe

What does your role involve? I was asked to train as an RHS judge about ten years ago and have taken part in show garden judging at Chelsea every year since. A judging panel is made up of three assessing judges, four regular judges and a moderator and I've either been an assessing judge or a judge. Assessing judges visit the garden a day before the other judges and hear the designer give a two-minute presentation. It is a chance for the designer to share any changes to their submitted brief – they might have had issues with sourcing a particular tree, for example. The assessors then work through the criteria and come up with medal recommendations to share with the judges. Assessors and judges then meet the following day on the garden, to go through the criteria again and make a final medal decision.

The brief that designers submit in advance of the show is vital. Judges are expecting to be presented with a garden that fits that brief, and if the designer has moved away from their initial plan it can have an impact on their marks. For example, if they have said they're creating a garden for pollinators and the garden has few plants for pollinators, they'll be marked down.

Once you've judged at a show it's not a given that you'll be asked again. You have to follow the criteria and offer great value to the panel. We're all volunteers, but this doesn't stop us from taking our roles incredibly seriously. I see it as one of the most important things I do each year.

My background is as a garden writer and hands-on gardener, so I'm on the team to share my expertise on planting, the long-term maintenance of the garden and its story. Alongside me there are designers and landscapers, so there is a wide variety of expertise to call on.

What is the biggest challenge? It has to be expressing your thoughts about a garden without being too emotional. You can't judge with your heart – it has to be with your head. The criteria are absolutely vital and by using them you ensure that clear feedback can be given to designers. It's tricky but essential to avoid using words such as like or love. Our comments must be clear, factual and have substance behind them.

What was your first experience of Chelsea? My first experience was in 1993. I was a student at Sparsholt College in Hampshire. Along with fellow students we built a garden exhibit in the Great Pavilion. It was such an important memory for me – so much so that I wrote a chapter on it my gardening book *Grasping the Nettle*. I'm sure this early opportunity is why I just adore this event. The students at Sparsholt still exhibit and every year I make a point of going to see their work at the show. Much to my delight one of my tutors, Chris Bird, is still the mastermind behind their work.

> "The biggest challenge? It has to be expressing your thoughts about a garden without being too emotional. You can't judge with your heart – it has to be with your head"
>
> TAMSIN WESTHORPE, CHELSEA SHOW GARDEN JUDGE

What are you looking forward to this year? The show gardens are a highlight but I'm always keen to see the displays of cut flower tulips in the Great Pavilion and make my selection for the following year.

What is your favourite aspect of the show? Definitely the privilege of being able to step on to the show gardens. Very few people get to do it and the excitement I feel each time is always as great as it was ten years ago. You feel as if you have stepped into another world. It's just magical.

THE MENTOR

Paul Hervey-Brookes

What does your role involve? This year I'm mentoring the designers in the Balcony and Container Garden categories for new designers to the show. Our work starts with the selection panel process in June the year before the show, so we spend 11 months with the designers, with monthly workshops and meetings, refining their design and construction methods and looking at the assessing and judging of gardens.

We also hold one-to-one meetings for individual aspects of the build. I generally pose lots of questions, such as asking about the size and quality of plants and the layout, to make the spaces feel both realistic and engaging for visitors. After that, the mentoring team are on hand during the build to help keep the designers on track. It's easy to start looking at what others are

NAOMI NCUBE PHOTOGRAPHY; OLIVER DIXON.

> “Growing for Chelsea is an extremely demanding and stressful process. We are growing plants for up to eight months to look at their peak for one day – judging day”
>
> SIMON SUTCLIFFE, HOW GREEN NURSERY

doing and lose your individual focus. Often changes are last minute or plants may not have performed as expected.

I am there to offer, I hope, a calming hand and to give the designers the support to make decisions and keep to the build timeframe. At Chelsea I’ve made eight of my own gardens since 2010, so I hope I am able to share useful insights with the designers, who always come with exciting and new ideas.

What is your favourite aspect of the show? Working with the team building a garden, everyone is working to create something that has really until this moment only existed in the designer’s mind.

What are you particularly looking forward to this year? The unexpected. Every year you read or see something you anticipate, but often it’s the exhibit or garden or component you didn’t expect which stands out.

THE HEAD OF A PLANTING TEAM

Gillian Goodson

What does your role involve? I’m a garden and landscape designer and I’ve have worked at Chelsea for over ten years, leading planting teams on many award-winning gardens. This year I’m working on Miria Harris’s garden.

I co-ordinate the planting team but also work closely with the designer leading up to the show, from visiting nurseries to checking progress of plants, budgeting, receiving plant deliveries and choosing core team members and volunteers. The core team usually work for five to ten days whereas I would be involved earlier. My role is to free up the designer to focus on other things.

The whole team works together and lots of camaraderie and team spirit is needed. The core planting team often start at 7am, working ten to 12-hour days, in all weathers, without a day off. Physical, mental and emotional strength is needed to persevere.

Planting at shows is theatre. It involves a lot of smoke and mirrors. It captures a moment in time, rather than plants growing and evolving over the years. But the planting needs to be horticulturally correct – shade lovers must be planted in shade, for example. We also have the chance to try out new planting combinations. The secret is to give the plants time to settle before the show, so they look as though they have been growing in harmony and combine effortlessly with the hard landscaping. We remove all dead and damaged leaves to make it all look perfect.

What are you looking forward to this year? Designers and contractors are becoming more aware of the impact their choices have on the natural environment, coming up with innovative ideas that push boundaries or redefine what we consider beautiful or acceptable. I love seeing those gems that are translatable and adaptable to clients’ gardens.

What is the biggest challenge that you anticipate? Miria’s design includes a natural clay-lined pond. Clay needs time to settle and we only have a small window of time. The challenge will be planting the aquatics directly into the clay without compromising its integrity. Should a plant not perform, we may need to ‘levitate’ above the pond as there’s no second chance to go back in the water in our waders.

THE GROWER

Simon Sutcliffe, How Green Nursery

What does your role involve? We’re growing for three gardens, all in the All About Plants category: the Sue Ryder Grief Garden, designed by Katherine Holland; The Panathlon Joy Garden, designed by Penelope Walker; and The Pulp Friction Garden, designed by Will Dutch and Tin-Tin Azure-Marxen. In total we are growing around 2,500 plants – mainly herbaceous perennials, ornamental grasses, herbs and hardy annuals. Growing started back in October 2023.

This will be our 12th year growing for Chelsea and our third growing peat free. Growing for Chelsea is an extremely demanding and stressful process. We are growing plants for up to eight months to look at their peak for one day – judging day. Plant selection throughout the process is critical, to hand pick the best plants, for ultimately the best garden show in the world.

What is going to be your biggest challenge? The weather. Plants are constantly moved between glasshouses, tunnels and outside, depending on the weather patterns. It’s becoming increasingly difficult with the extremes we now get.

What’s your favourite aspect of the show? Seeing fabulous gardens with our plants come to fruition. I’m constantly amazed at some of the plant combinations designers can put together.

> “Planting at shows is theatre. It involves a lot of smoke and mirrors. It captures a moment in time, rather than plants growing and evolving over the years”
>
> GILLIAN GOODSON, HEAD OF PLANTING TEAM

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WHAT'S THE FUTURE OF THE GREAT PAVILION?

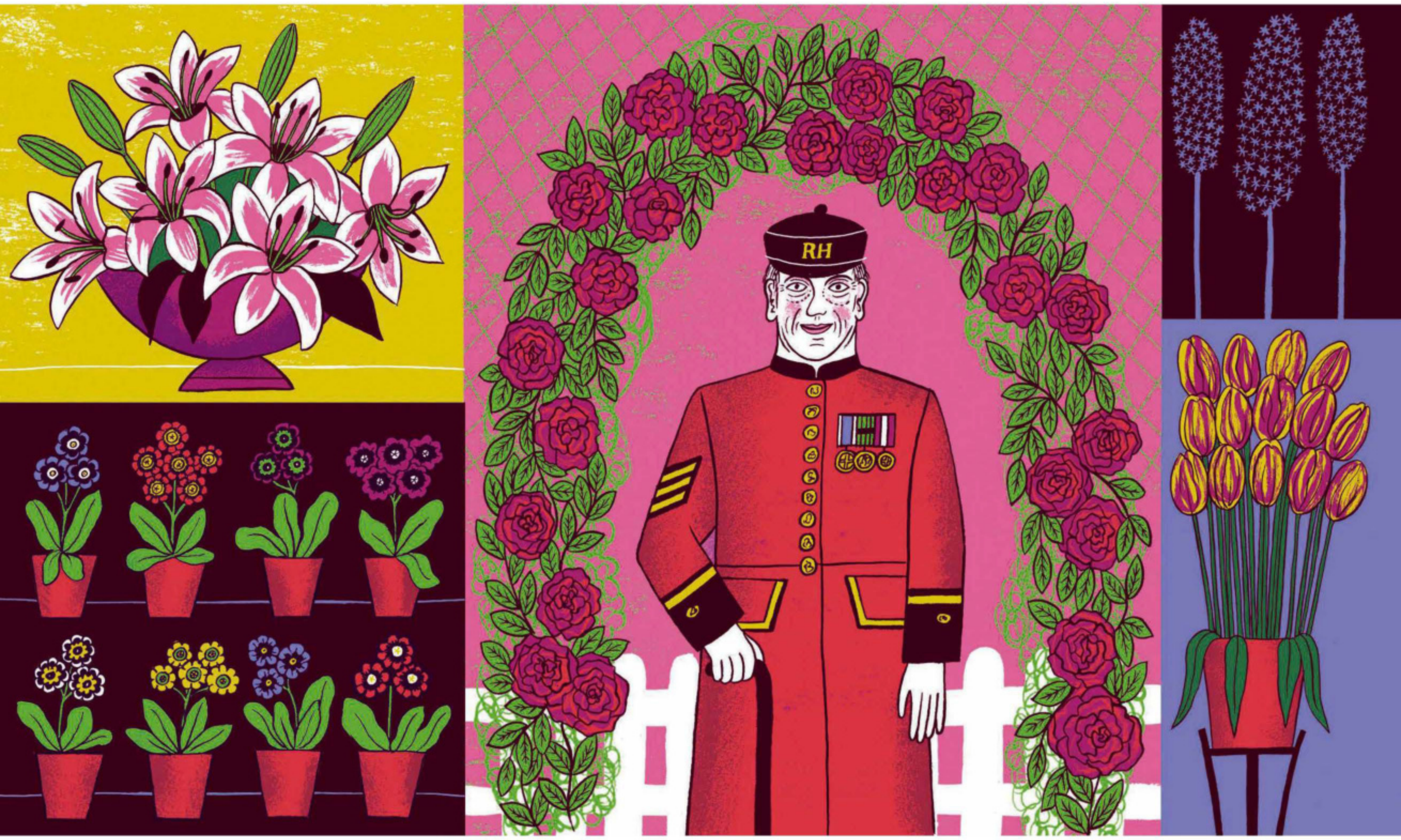
Exhibiting at the RHS Chelsea Flower Show is every plant nursery's dream, but the face of the Great Pavilion has changed noticeably over recent years. We look into what is going on under the awnings of the big white tent

WORDS **ZIA ALLAWAY** ILLUSTRATION **ALICE PATTULLO**

Standing proud amid the razzle-dazzle of spectacular show gardens, the Great Pavilion represents the beating heart of the RHS Chelsea Flower Show, where the top nurseries in the UK and from further afield come to exhibit their pristine plants to millions of awestruck visitors and TV viewers at home. Chelsea has also just been named the world's fifth most popular 'must see' experience by travel company Kuoni, so it's no wonder that every plant nursery worth its salt aspires to be there.

However, regular visitors to the show may have noticed that some of their favourite nurseries have disappeared from the Pavilion in recent years. Helen Boem, RHS shows floral development manager, confirms that numbers this year are lower than a decade ago. "In 2014, we had 97 separate nurseries, but that has gradually fallen to 76 exhibits this year, and there are several reasons for that," she says.

"Some nursery owners have retired, while a few stopped trading during the pandemic and haven't returned. We also recognise that it's expensive for a small nursery to come to Chelsea. As well as the cost of plants and the owners' time, there's accommodation and transport, while heating and lighting bills for greenhouses have gone through the roof. Some nursery owners also tell us that they simply can't afford to leave their business unattended for two weeks, if they have no other cover." To provide assistance, the RHS offers all nurseries at Chelsea ▷



▷ a small recompense payment and a travel allowance. “They also have free sales space, which they have to pay for at other RHS shows, and we’ve increased the size of the sales units, so they can sell more plants to help cover their costs,” explains Helen.

Despite the fall in nursery numbers, Helen and her team work hard every year to ensure that the Great Pavilion fulfils its promise. “The Discovery Zone (where visitors can learn about plant science), All About Plants gardens and the Floristry Competition, are just some of the other features visitors can enjoy.” She also reaches out to nurseries, especially small independents, who would be a good fit, either because they offer a plant group that is missing or under-represented in the Pavilion, or they have something new to offer. “We get a lot of direct enquiries from nurseries, too, and after passing our quality checks, we may then ask them to try out another RHS show first to test the water, before coming to Chelsea,” she adds.

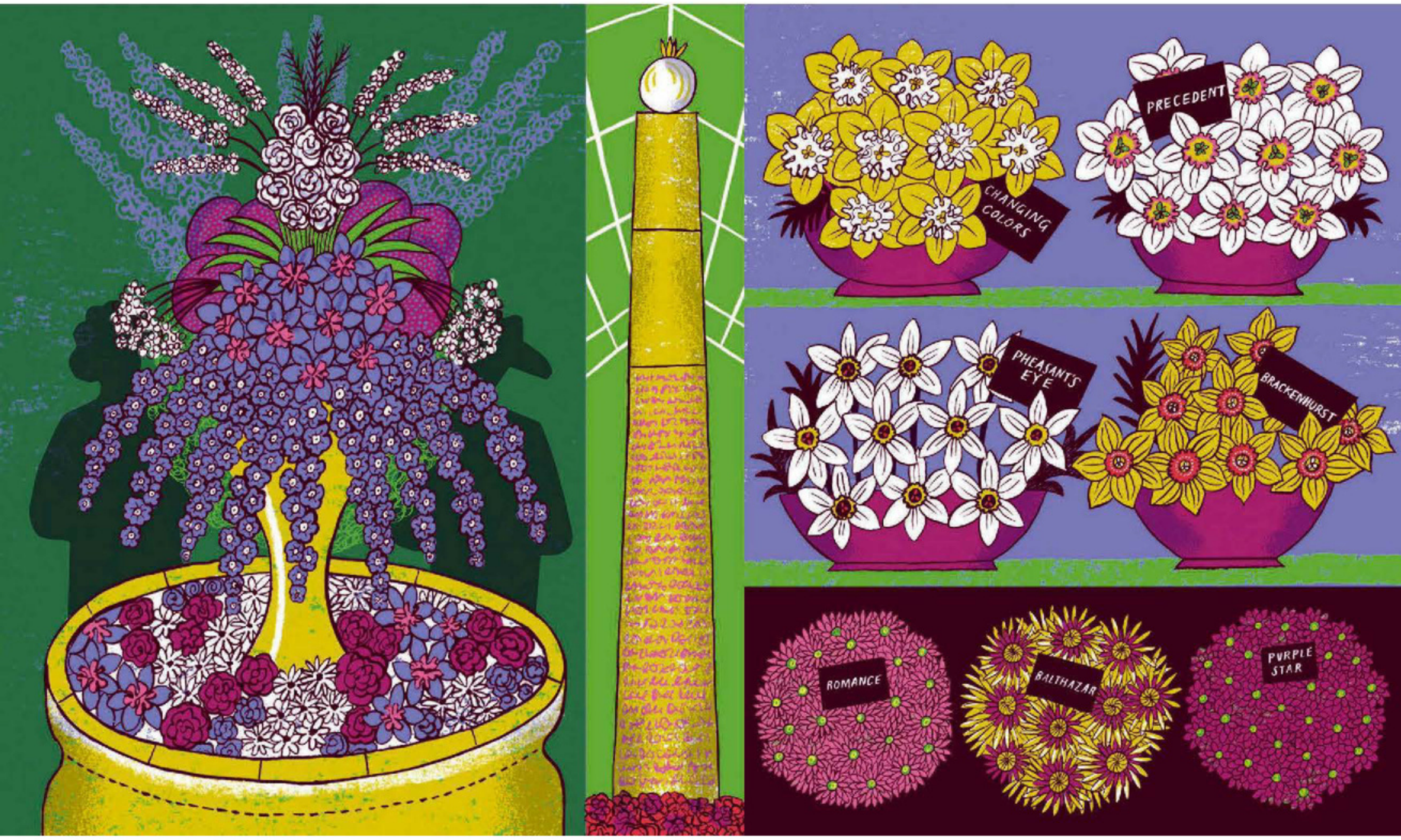
Help at hand

The RHS mentoring scheme is another way the charity is helping newbie exhibitors get the most from the show. Rob and Rosy Hardy, owners of Hardy’s Cottage Garden Plants, have been mentoring for many years and, with 24 Chelsea Gold medals under their belts, their advice is invaluable. Rob says: “Rosy is mentoring Emma Tipping, who is creating a display around the Monument focusing on how nurseries grow edibles, and I’m working with Chelsea first-timers Tissington Nursery; Jonathan Sheppard, who has the National Plant Collection of *Cosmos*; and Strete Gate Camellias. While Rosy is the plant expert, I can offer more practical tips, such as getting your timing right. Those new to the show often underestimate how long it takes to get plants into the Pavilion and unload them.

“You should also aim to finish on Saturday night, so you have Sunday to titivate your display before judging – herbaceous plants grow towards the light, so they need 24 hours to settle, allowing you to see which way they’re going to face. With 170,000 potential customers at the show, I also encourage exhibitors to say hello to everyone and, if you can, chat to the celebrities on press day to get yourself some free publicity.”

Overcoming the obstacles

Despite the time and money involved, the draw of Chelsea encourages many nurseries and plant companies to apply for a stand. This year, seed company start-up She Grows Veg, founded by Instagrammer Lucy Hutchings and marketeer Kate Cotterill, jumped at the chance to showcase their heirloom, open-pollinated seeds. “Although we’ve only just launched the company, we see Chelsea as a massive brand-awareness campaign,” explains Kate. “We were lucky to get selected, but I think we were chosen because our ethos aligns with the RHS’s and our customer base is largely under 45, a demographic we



> Despite the time and money involved, the draw of Chelsea encourages many nurseries and plant companies to apply for a stand

know the charity is keen to attract.” The duo are being mentored by Chelsea stalwart Jon Wheatley, who is also growing plants for the display, and they’re drafting in acclaimed florist Hazel Gardiner to create framed, immersive displays, reminiscent of Renaissance paintings. “We’re marrying floristry with produce in a totally new way, and we’ll be encouraging visitors to don one of our veggie crowns and post an image of themselves sitting in a large picture frame covered with edibles,” says Lucy. “The chef Raymond Blanc will also be on the stand making soup with our ingredients on press day, which is a bit of a coup.”

The company has been selected to contribute to Emma Tipping’s Monument display, too, for which they and three other companies (Kent Wildflower Seeds, Caley Brothers Mushrooms and Kitchen Garden Plant Centre) have been awarded a grant from sponsor UBS Financial Services.

Recognising the difficulties small nurseries have in bringing their plants to Chelsea, last year the RHS approved for the first time a group exhibit by Plant Fairs Roadshow. They are returning this year with displays from seven nurseries, including Special Plants, run by Derry Watkins, who hasn’t exhibited at Chelsea since 1999. “My dramatic exhibit back then, called ‘What’s Black and White and Red Only Occasionally?’, received an amazing response, and the publicity put the nursery on the map, but the vast amount of work involved put me off returning until now,” she says. “The Plant Fairs Roadshow exhibit is a great idea because we’re each sharing the time managing the stand and my display is much smaller and more manageable.”

Reliable returns

For many visitors, the magic in the Pavilion is delivered each year by major players such as David Austin Roses, Blackmore & Langdon’s delphiniums and begonias, and Raymond Evison Clematis. So, why do these companies keep coming back? Andy Jeanes, international sales marketing manager for Raymond Evison Clematis, explains: “As a global supplier and breeder, it’s important for us to showcase our existing varieties and new forms at the premier horticultural show in the world. We also find the feedback from visitors a great source of market research and we can impart our knowledge, too, so they get the best from our clematis.” ▷

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'Persian Slipper'

▷ The allure of Chelsea also tempts smaller nurseries back. Family-owned Lincolnshire Pond Plants came for the first time last year and took home a Gold medal, which co-owner Dawn Fisher says has prompted their return. "This year, we're including a bridge, allowing people to walk over the water to get up close to the plants," she says. "But, as an aquatic plant nursery, we have the additional cost of a larger water bill, both to fill the pond and to drain it after the show. However, Chelsea last year was amazing and helped us secure some deals with landscapers and garden centres, as well as private customers, so it was definitely worth it."

Future plans

Helen Boem says the future of the Great Pavilion is secure, and the All About Plants show gardens have given it a boost. "They are designed to celebrate unusual and specialist plants and encourage links with exhibitors. The visitors also like them because they can see the plants at close range and in a garden setting," she explains.

Innovations for the future in the Pavilion include more sustainable growing techniques and a focus on plant conservation, while nurseries wishing to showcase plants that are out of season in May can create an educational display, perhaps revealing the history of a species or cultivation tips, instead of always having to be plant-packed stands in flower. ◻

Other exhibits to watch out for

- **Before you even get to the showground,** there will be a bevy of beautiful flowers to enjoy as the streets come to life for Chelsea in Bloom. London's largest free flower festival runs from 20-26 May on the theme Floral Feasts.

- **The trade stands can be just as eye-catching** as the show gardens. Hartley Botanic will be constructing the largest ever glasshouse at the show, while Alitex will create an enchanting walled kitchen garden. Sculptor David Harber is celebrating 30 years and has teamed up with outdoor specialists Gaze Burvill for a scheme designed by Jamie Langlands. Also celebrating 30 years in 2024, Sarah Raven will be bringing a little piece of Perch Hill's cutting garden to her stand for the show this year.

- **Show sponsor The Newt in Somerset** will be creating a Roman-inspired garden based on the estate's own recreated Roman villa and garden: a colonnaded courtyard based on the design and planting popular during the 1st century CE.

- **Don't forget to visit** the always interesting Houseplant Studios and check out the floristry displays in the Pavilion.

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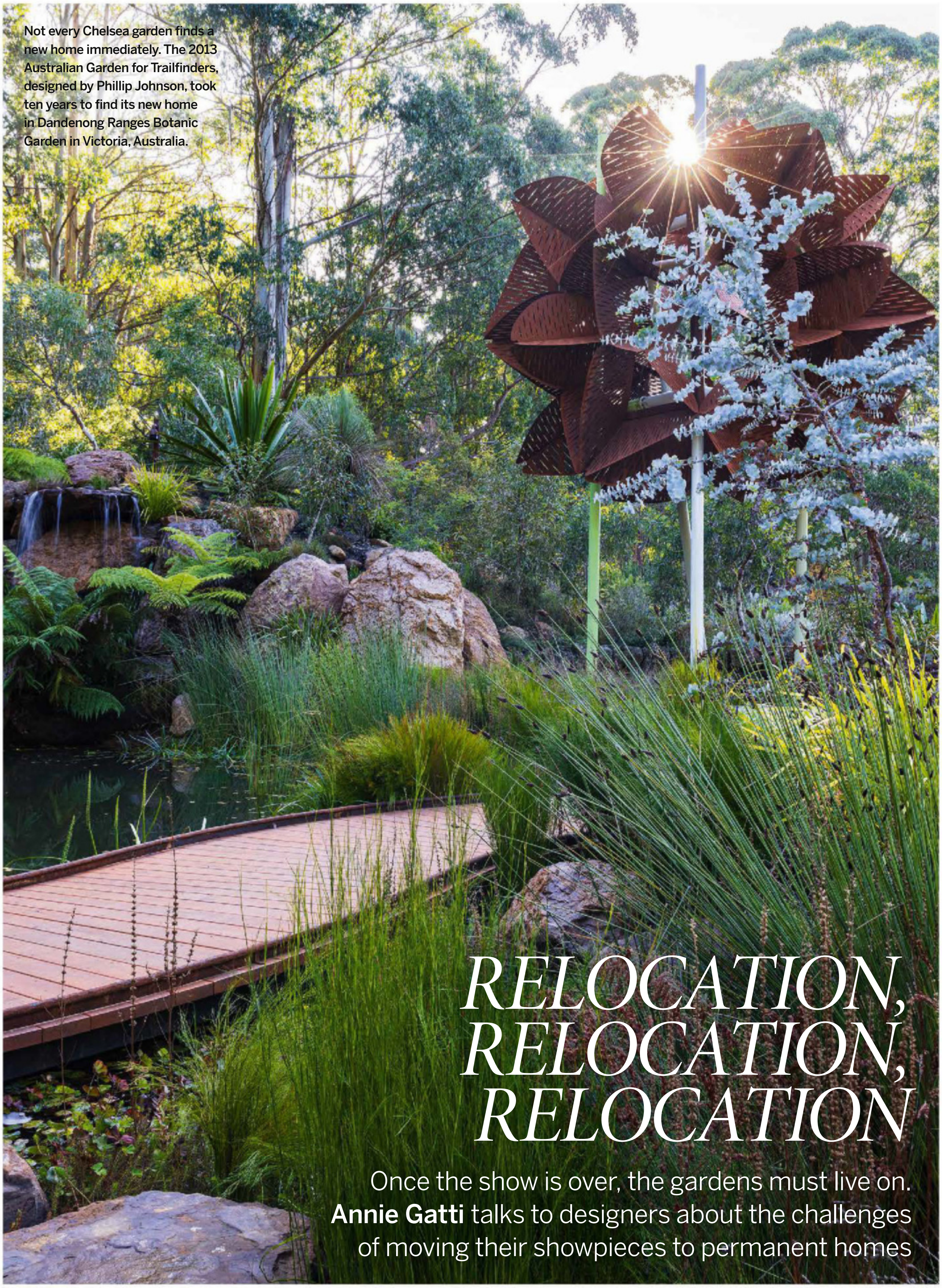
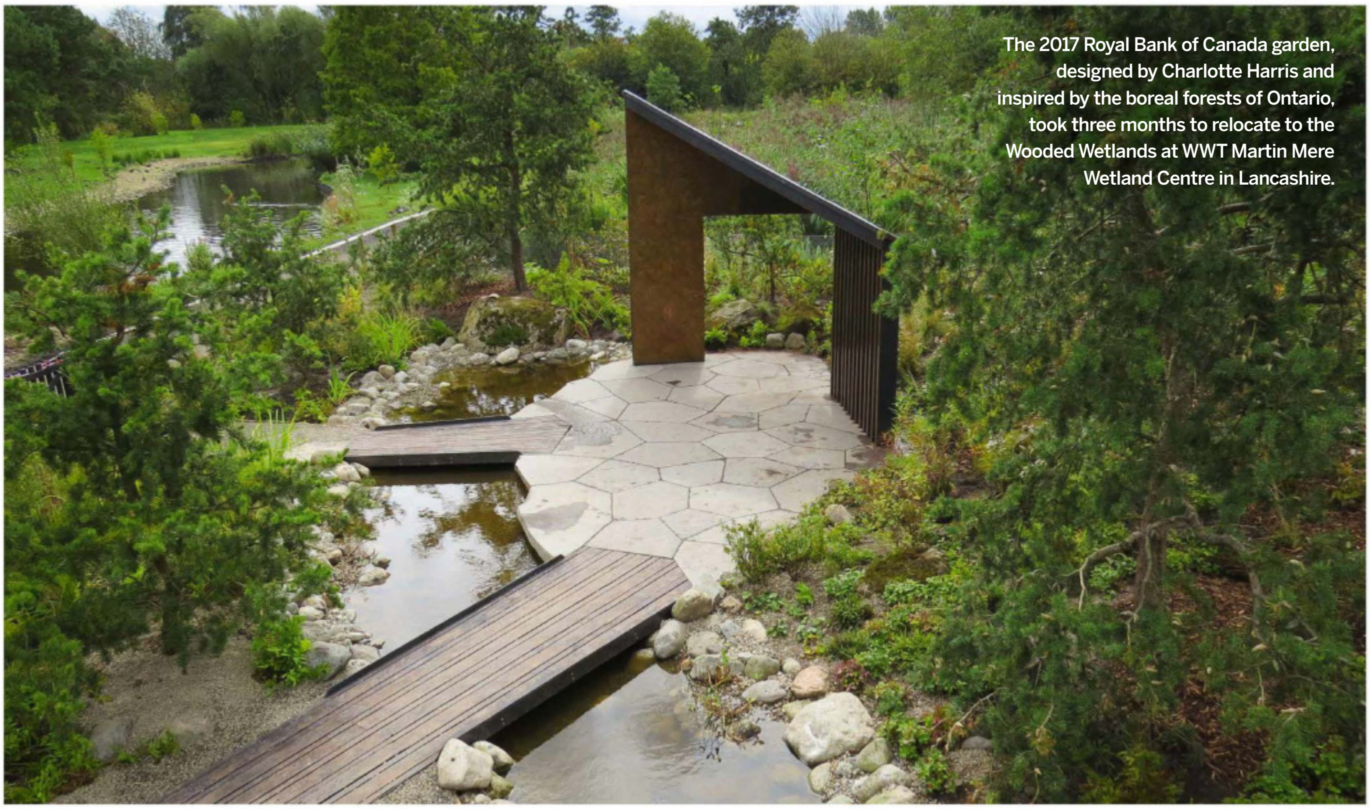


Not every Chelsea garden finds a new home immediately. The 2013 Australian Garden for Trailfinders, designed by Phillip Johnson, took ten years to find its new home in Dandenong Ranges Botanic Garden in Victoria, Australia.

RELOCATION, RELOCATION, RELOCATION

Once the show is over, the gardens must live on. **Annie Gatti** talks to designers about the challenges of moving their showpieces to permanent homes

CLAIRE TAKACS



The 2017 Royal Bank of Canada garden, designed by Charlotte Harris and inspired by the boreal forests of Ontario, took three months to relocate to the Wooded Wetlands at WWT Martin Mere Wetland Centre in Lancashire.

This year, the RHS Chelsea Flower Show gardens, big and small, are set to live on across the UK after the show, in hospitals, charity centres, schools, community gardens, in a hospice, a churchyard, a botanic garden and more. For some time now, all those involved in creating a show garden have known that the practices of the past, when materials and plants were often thrown into skips as gardens were being dismantled at the end of show week, are just not acceptable any longer. When Project Giving Back (PGB), the sponsorship scheme that pairs charities with designers, launched in 2021, it specified that the chosen gardens should be 'repurposed in permanent sites for the benefit and enjoyment of local communities'.

Since 2023, the RHS has made it a condition of all show garden applications that each garden will have a future life, either rebuilt in its entirety or repurposed, with all of the elements being reused. For the RHS, explains head of shows development Sarah Poll, the new rule is "mostly driven environmentally. We don't mind if it goes to different places, as long as it's not going to landfill". For Project Giving Back, says CEO Hattie Ghaui, "relocation extends the benefit for the charity sponsor of being at Chelsea for five days. From a pragmatic investment point of view, it's about making the money we're investing go further".

> The challenge for the designer is to build a magical masterpiece at Chelsea that can be moved and live a really long, healthy life afterwards

Challenging moves

Designers who already have experience of relocating their show gardens know that it can be both costly and challenging. Hugo Bugg, whose first Chelsea garden for the Royal Bank of Canada (RBC) in 2014 was relocated to Vauxhall Pleasure Gardens, says having a sponsor that is financially committed to relocating makes a big difference. "RBC were fantastic as relocation was part of their brief from the start," he says. "They had a specific team responsible for finding the site, which had to be a community or charity site that would be ready to receive the garden straight away. The cost of transporting and rebuilding the garden, and its future maintenance, had to be factored in."

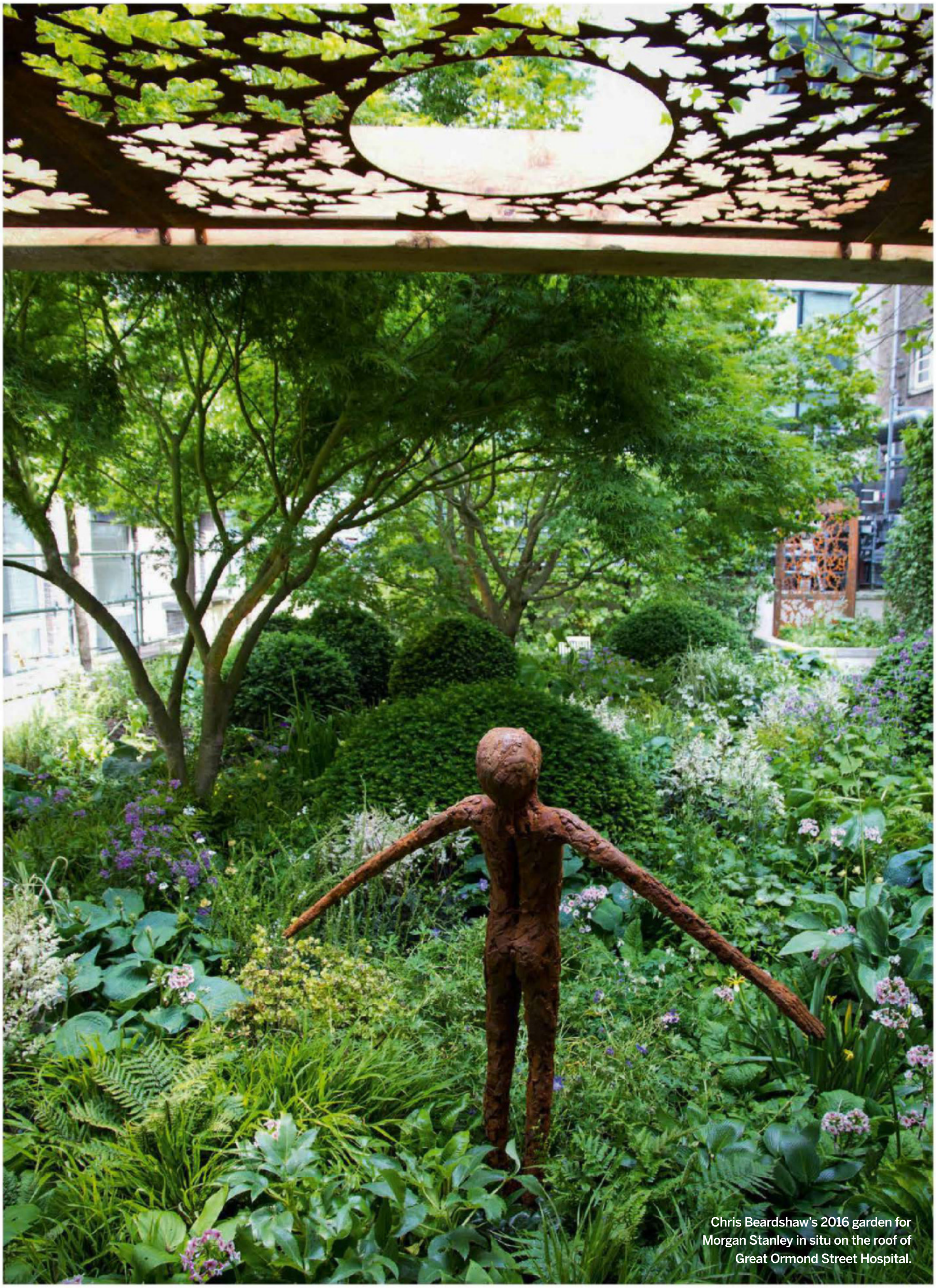
The challenge for the designer, he says, is to "build a magical masterpiece at Chelsea that can be moved and live a really long, healthy life afterwards". This means detailing the garden so that it can be easily dismantled and moved, but the structures must also be robust enough to last for many years, not just two weeks.

Hugo points out that single-use materials such as poured concrete, which would get damaged on breakdown, should be avoided. The cement-free terrazzo paths in Harris Bugg Studio's 2023 show garden were constructed from 2m x 1.5m slabs that were lifted and transported after the show for use in the Sheffield Horatio's Garden. Designers also need to find more weatherproof alternatives to materials such as plywood, chipboard and untreated mild steel.

Climbing costs

The cost of relocation varies according to the complexity of the show garden, as well as transport, storage and the time taken to reinstall it. Designer Darryl Moore reckons the relocation cost can be up to 50 per cent of the cost of the show garden. "At the relocation site it might take more time to build it, and some of the work may need to be done more thoroughly to enable it to last permanently."

PGB is monitoring the relocation costs of all its gardens and in 2023 it allocated between 10 and 20 per cent of the total sponsorship amount for relocation. "If it's ▷



Chris Beardshaw's 2016 garden for Morgan Stanley in situ on the roof of Great Ormond Street Hospital.

From left The 2022 St Mungo's Putting Down Roots garden by Cityscapes has transformed a formerly neglected corner of Southwark into a green, urban oasis; it took just six weeks to relocate Taina Suonio's 2022 sanctuary garden Connected to University College London Hospital, where its larger-than-life oak tree stump provides a serene seating area for patients and staff; elements of Harris Bugg Studio's 2023 garden for Horatio's Garden had to go into storage until the Sheffield site is ready to receive it.

▷ a simple relocation, the amount we ring-fence can be enough," says Hattie Ghaui. "Where it gets more complex, the designer/sponsor team have to think of ways to get in additional financial support if needed."

> The RHS is planning to start an audit of relocated gardens this year – those both completed and in progress – but perhaps the best monitors are the designers themselves

Keeping time

Chris Beardshaw's 2016 garden for Morgan Stanley was a great example of designing for the real world and for the show. "Our focus was to produce a design for a woodland space for Great Ormond Street Hospital [GOSH] rooftop. We only had to subtly manipulate the design for Chelsea – the position of the trees within the show garden was entirely governed by the supporting posts and pillars of the GOSH roof that would hold the weight of the trees. In terms of plants, we had a separate palette being grown in parallel to the Chelsea plants, to extend the season of interest at GOSH." Chris describes the process as a logistical dance made more complex by the fact that all the construction materials had to be craned over the hospital buildings, and the only way in for the team and their hand tools was through a series of underground passageways.

The relocation of Cityscapes' 2022 St Mungo's Putting Down Roots Garden started straight after the show, with all the plants and materials being stored at the site of its new home, by Southwark Crown Court in London. In the past, it was typical for relocated gardens to be broken up and stored in various facilities for a period of time before being reinstalled at their final site. But sending them to storage, says co-designer Darryl Moore, entails double transport and environmental costs. The rebuild should have taken a month or two, but ended up taking five, as judges in the nearby court would only allow a one-hour window each day to do noisy work – an unexpected restriction.

The RHS does not put a time limit on relocations – Phillip Johnson's 2013 Australian Garden for Trailfinders found a new home in Dandenong Ranges Botanic Garden, Victoria, ten years after his Best in Show win – but PGB-sponsored gardens are encouraged to complete within two years. The sponsors are flexible with gardens that are part of bigger development projects, however, such as the Harris Bugg Studio's Best in Show 2023 garden for Horatio's Garden. "We knew the Sheffield site wouldn't be ready straight away," says Hugo Bugg, "so we had a huge plant sale after the show, while the trees and structures went to a holding nursery in Cheshire. The sale allowed us to buy twice as many 9cm plants than we had in 2-litre and 5-litres sizes at Chelsea."

The afterlife

If a sponsor has nowhere to receive a complete garden, the best sustainable alternative is to redistribute the elements. London-based design collective Wayward has supplied more than 500 schools and community spaces with Chelsea plants, and there are nurseries and landscape companies with space to store hard landscaping materials for reuse in future shows.

Taina Suonio's 2022 Connected sanctuary garden for Exante was relocated in six weeks to University College London Hospital, where its tree-trunk shelter provides a seating area for patients and hospital staff. For designers like her, seeing their garden given a permanent home in a community space is "the best thing about making a Chelsea garden". For Andy Sturgeon, the way his reinterpretation of his 2022 garden for MIND has been taken on by the workers and volunteers at the MIND centre in Barrow-in-Furness is a particular joy. "What is brilliant about it is the way they have involved so many community groups to use it and maintain it. It has taken on a life of its own."

Some relocation plans will inevitably fall through – the RHS does not, as yet, keep a tally of no-shows – but with those that are completed, who will monitor them to make sure they are looked after in the long term? At the moment, PGB pays for filming and photography, says Hattie Ghaui, "to incentivise and create a bit of competition about who's got the best relocated garden".

The RHS is planning to start an audit of relocated gardens this year – those both completed and in progress – but perhaps the best monitors are the designers themselves. After all, it's going to be their work that's on display to the public, day after day, season after season, for hopefully a long time to come. □

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Garden of Medicinal Plants – Chelsea Physic Garden Photo: R Alexander

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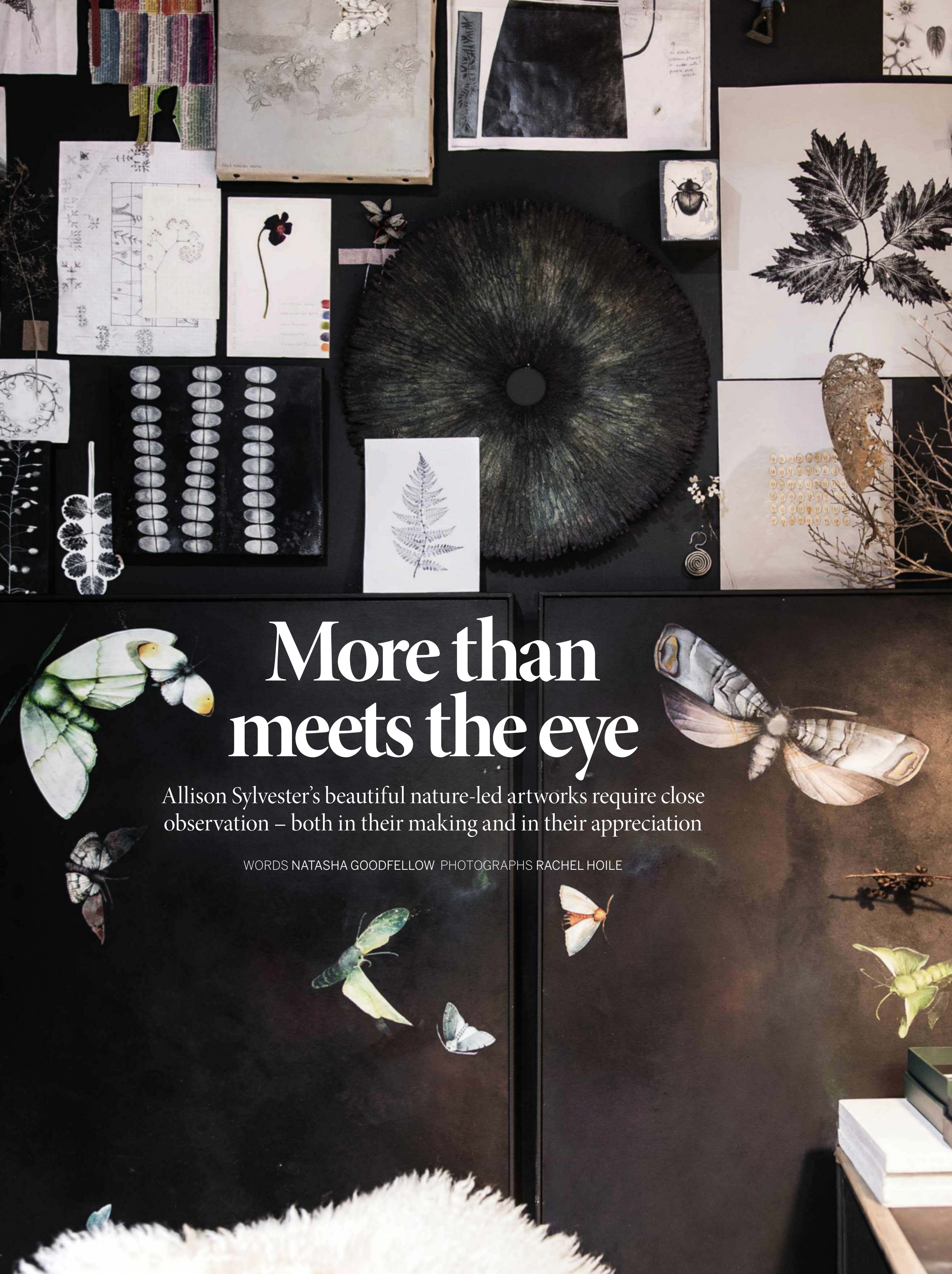
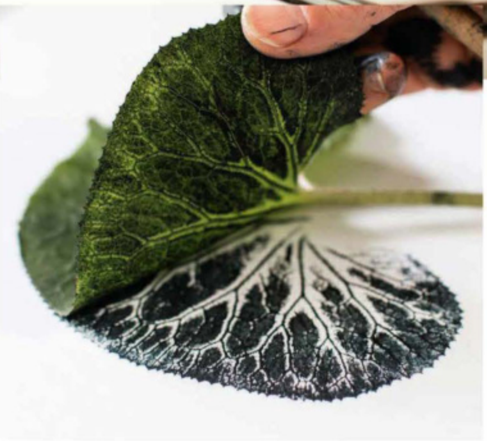


More than meets the eye

Allison Sylvester's beautiful nature-led artworks require close observation – both in their making and in their appreciation

WORDS **NATASHA GOODFELLOW** PHOTOGRAPHS **RACHEL HOILE**



Facing page Examples of artist Allison Sylvester’s eclectic work fill her studio wall, alongside images and objects that inspire her work.

This page, clockwise from above In her basement studio Allison prepares one of her intricate moth paintings.

Allison reveals a monoprint of a *Petasites fragrans* leaf.

Brushes and mark-making tools fill the studio shelves.

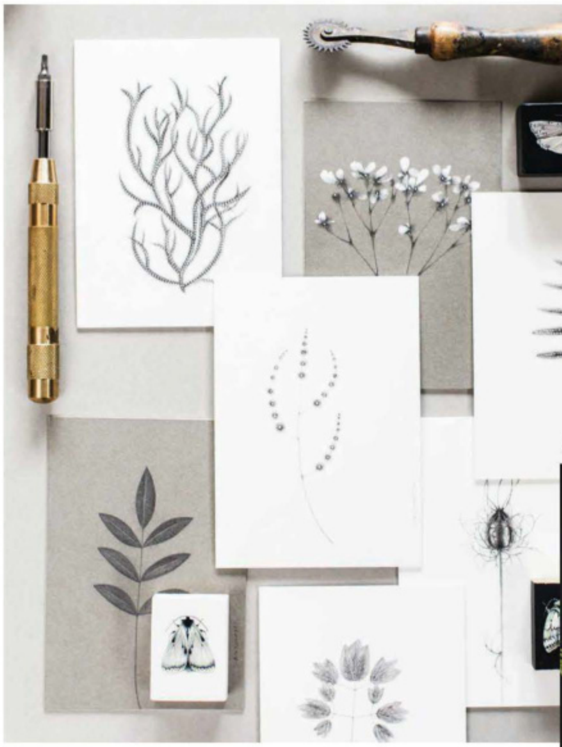
There’s something transfixing about Allison’s Sylvester’s artwork. Small though the majority of pieces might be, their detail is so intricate, one can’t help but take a closer look. Just how is this beautiful, almost heraldic geranium leaf image made? Is that monochromatic moth photographed, drawn or painted? And just what is that glint of gold on a block across which miniature flower vines ramble and twine?

“I’ve never been interested in drawing or painting landscapes,” says Allison. “It’s always been the small things that catch my eye.” This fascination started in her childhood in rural Devon, where she spent a lot of time outside. “I was left to my own devices for much of the time and anything I found – flowers, birds, dead bees – I would draw,” she says. “Nature was my sanctuary, my retreat and a place of constant inspiration – it still is.”

Having originally studied jewellery (where etching into metal was her preferred technique), Allison then went on to do a Masters’ degree in fine art printmaking, which allowed her to expand her love of drawing still further. “A print is never exactly the same as a drawing,” she says. “Every time you run it through the press and lift off your paper, it’s always a bit of a surprise. It’s very addictive.”

Today, monoprinting (in which leaves are painted with ink and then pressed on to paper or a pre-painted wooden block) is one of Allison’s favourite processes – something of a revelation for Allison as she had never particularly enjoyed drawing foliage. “I’d always preferred to draw flowers and was trying to find a way to speed up the drawing of leaves,” she says. “I was blown away by the amount of detail a monoprint can produce.

Another technique she enjoys is hammer printing – literally hammering plants to transfer their colours on to fabric or paper. “It’s especially satisfying when you’re using herbs such as mint, rosemary or sage, which release their scent as you work,” she says. She also ▷



This page, clockwise from top left
Allison experiments with a range of techniques for her drawing, using a selection of marking tools, including bradawls, metal jewellers' punches and lino-cutting tools for mark making on paper.

For printing larger pieces Allison takes over the family dining table.

Allison collecting leaves in her Totnes garden.

Facing page Allison's drawing of delicate *Circaea lutetiana*, more romantically known as enchanter's nightshade. It is these often overlooked plants that Allison loves to capture the most.

▷ paints and draws exquisite miniatures, and frequently combines techniques for greater effect.

For all but her largest pieces, for which she commandeers the kitchen table, Allison works in her "cave", a small, dark-walled studio in the basement of her Totnes home. Many years of trial and error have taught her what gives the best results. "Evergreen leaves aren't great for printing because the veins and pores aren't so evident," she explains. Likewise, fresh leaves work better than dry, though she allows them to wilt slightly, "so that they give me more". Stems, spikes and prickles tend to be too juicy or too sharp to print well and so Allison removes them, drawing or painting them, with the help of a large magnifying glass and the finest brushes available, on to the completed print.

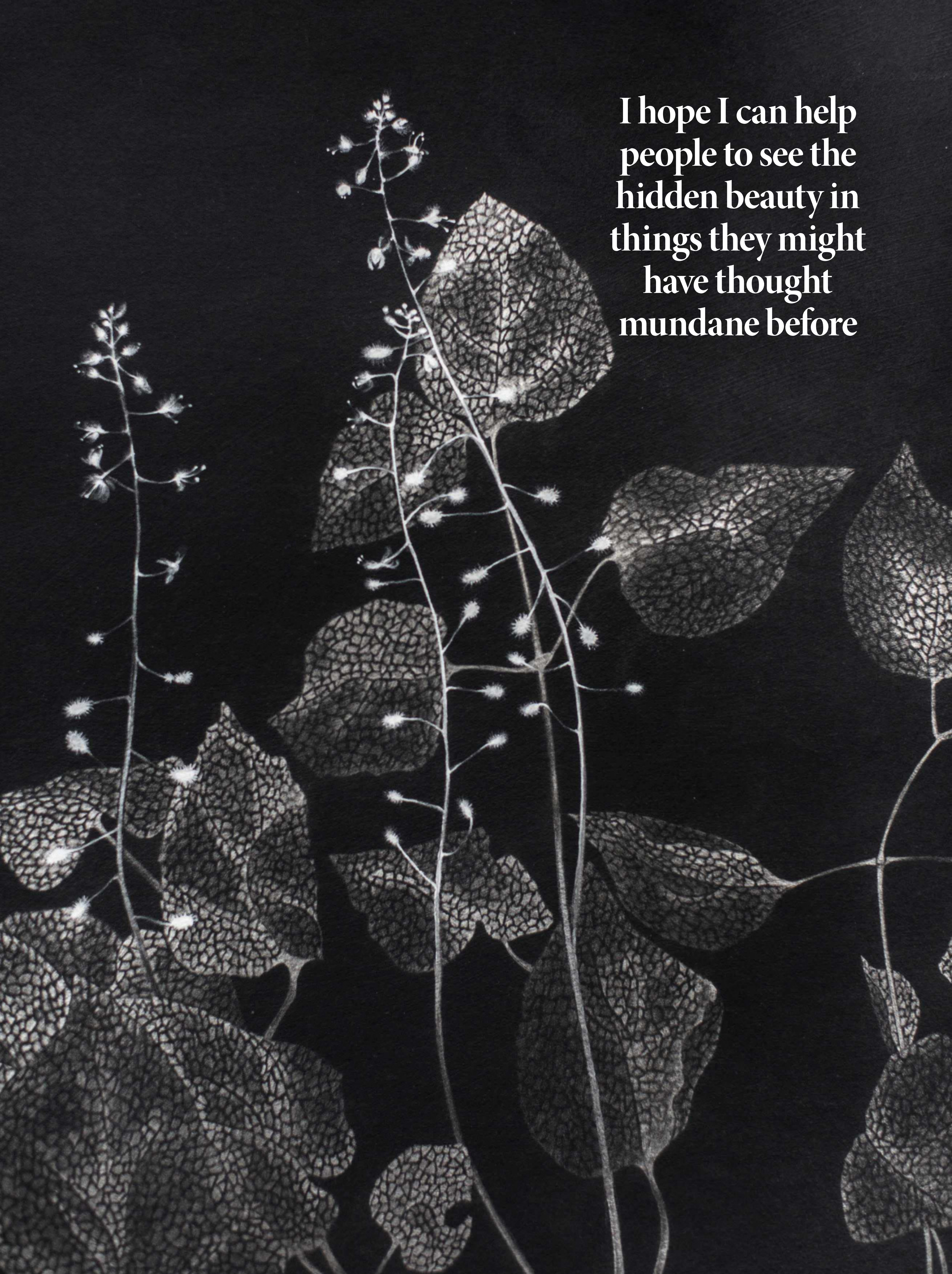
While she often looks for symmetrical leaves, or those with a strong silhouette, she also loves nibbled specimens ("they remind me of lace") and weeds which others might overlook. "I think we dismiss a lot of plants out of hand," she says, citing goose grass with its star-shaped flowers and sticky seedheads, and enchanter's nightshade, "which threads its way through a shady part of our garden, its tiny white flowers aglow".

Allison is drawn to moths for a similar reason, finding their understated patterns more interesting than brighter, showier butterflies. "I hope I can help people to see the hidden beauty in things they might have thought mundane before," she says.

To underline this feeling of treasure that she wishes to instil, Allison finishes her woodblock pieces in one of three ways – mounting them in painted frames, edging them in soft, grey velvet, or gilding the ends of the blocks. "All just add that little extra something to a piece," she says. "I want the people who own them to feel they are precious." □

USEFUL INFORMATION

Follow Allison on Instagram at @allison_sylvester and look out for her workshops at Kokutan flower farm in Devon (kokutan.co.uk) and at Damson Farm in Bath (alisonjenkins.co.uk). Allison will be part of regenerative fashion project The Loom, the Stitch and the Wardrobe at Craft Festival at Bovey Tracey (7-9 June).



I hope I can help people to see the hidden beauty in things they might have thought mundane before

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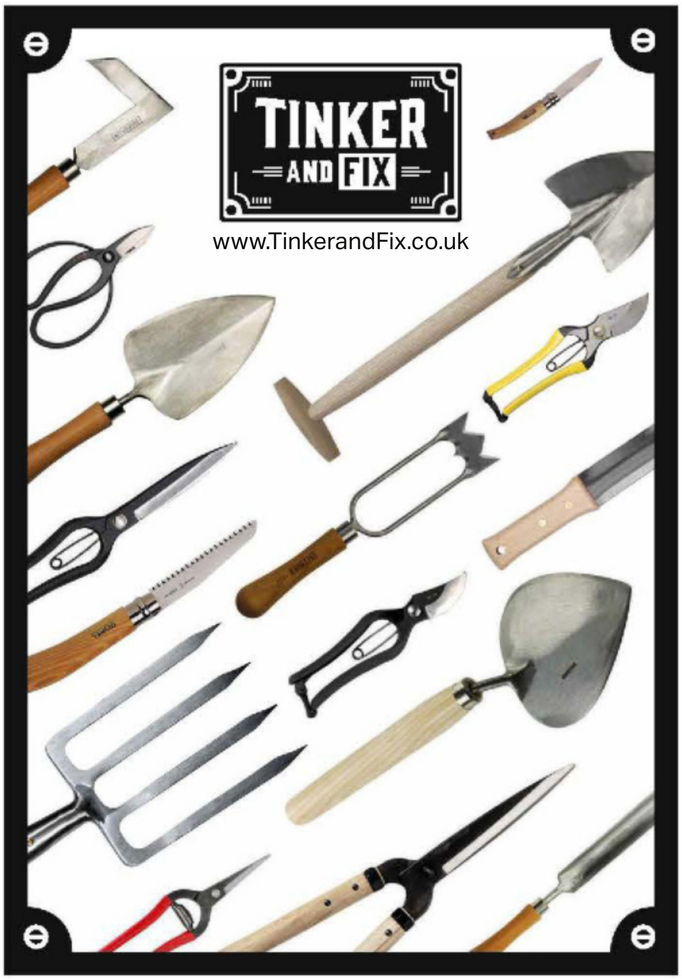

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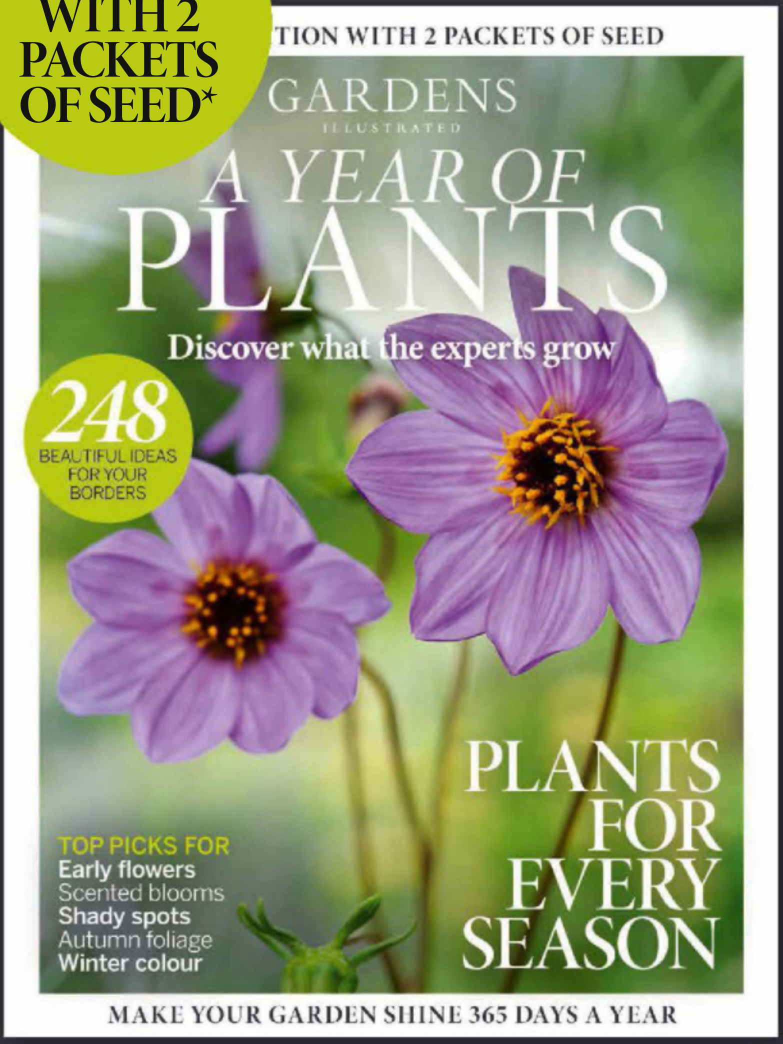

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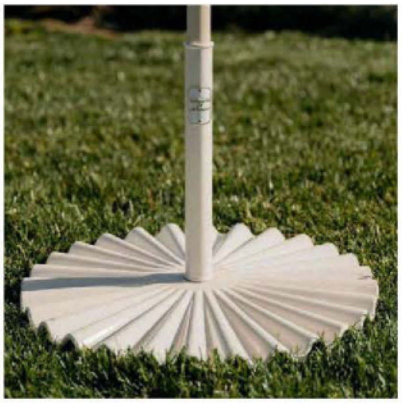

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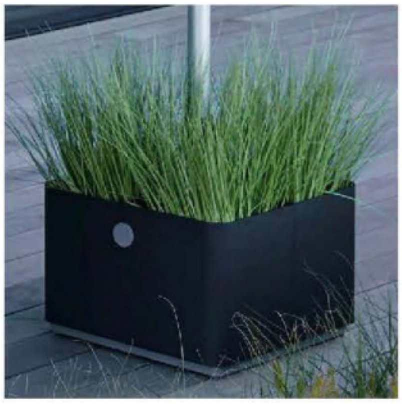
The Clamshell Umbrella Base,
£298, Business & Pleasure Co,
anthropologie.com



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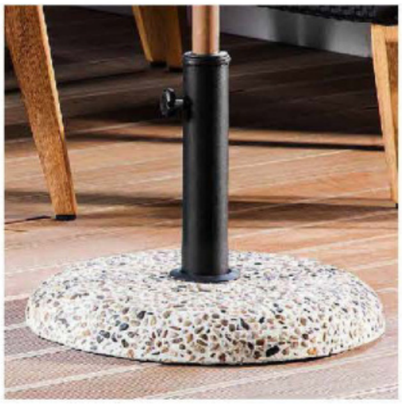
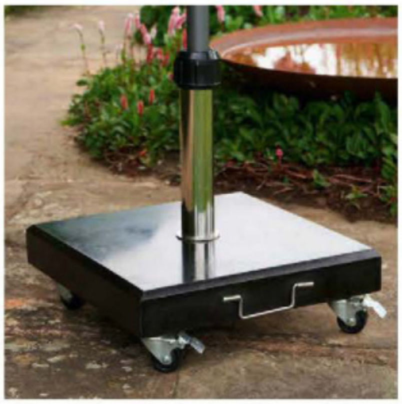
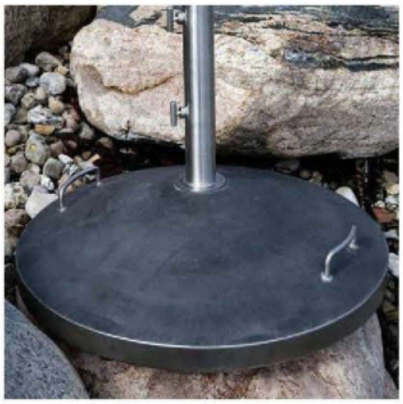
Grow Parasol Base Planter,
£585, Cane-line,
0345 605 2505, worm.co.uk



ROBUST
Concrete Parasol Base,
£119.99, Beliani,
020 3318 8222, beliani.co.uk



MOBILE
Rome Polished Black Granite Base 40kg,
£149.99, Harbour Lifestyle,
0330 808 1744, harbourlifestyle.co.uk



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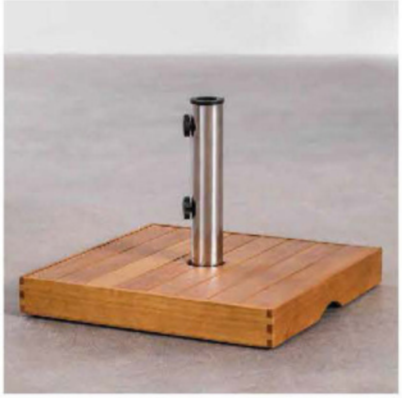

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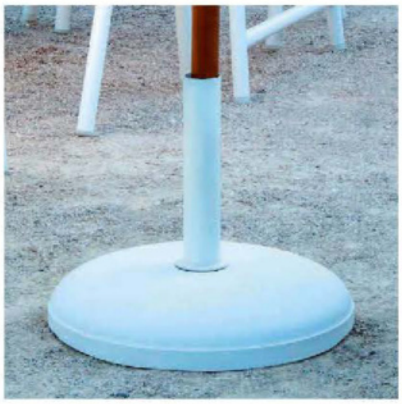

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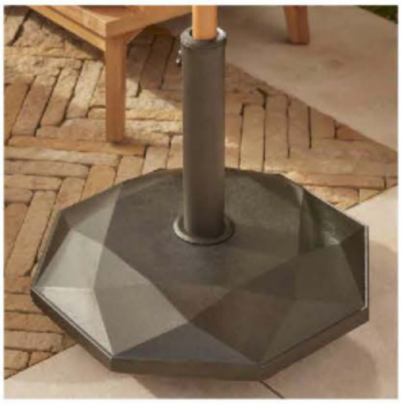

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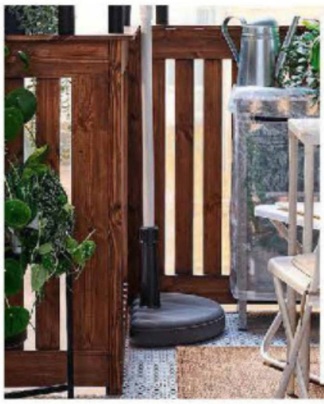

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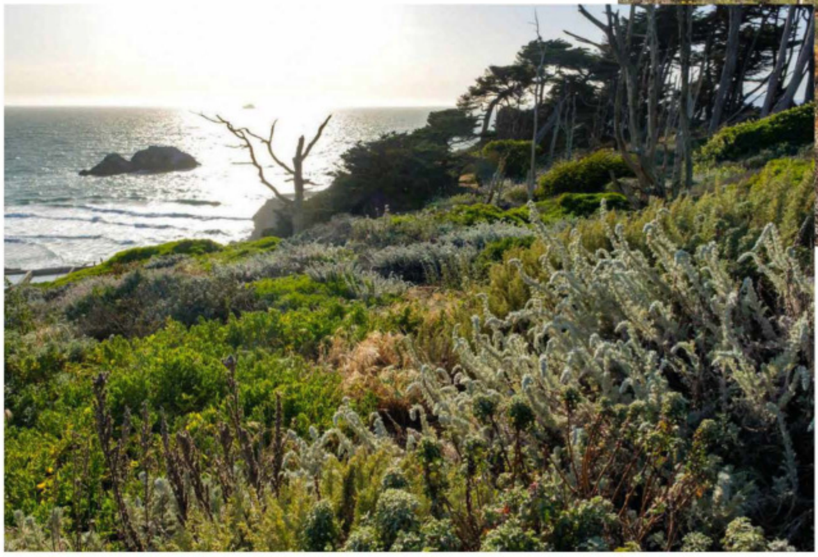
DOWNTOOLS

Book reviews, Q&A, the crossword and the big idea

A rich tapestry of grasses and perennials, framed by birch trees, in Keith Wiley's Wildside in Devon, one of the gardens featured in *Garden Heaven*, page 137

JASON INGRAM



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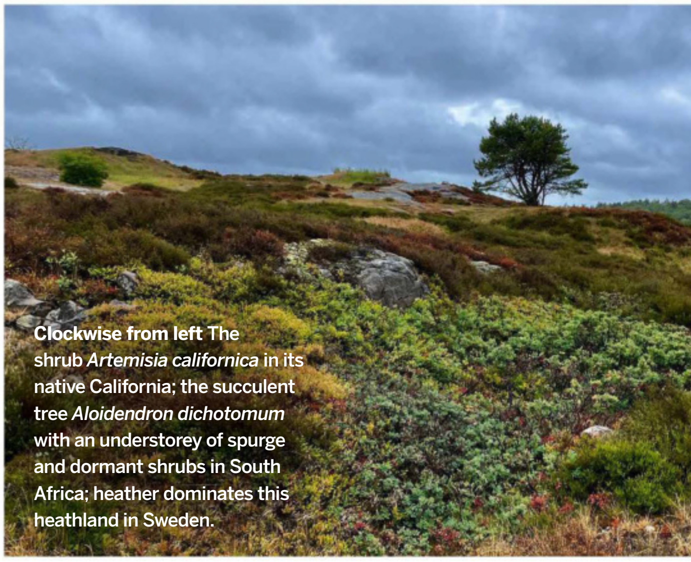
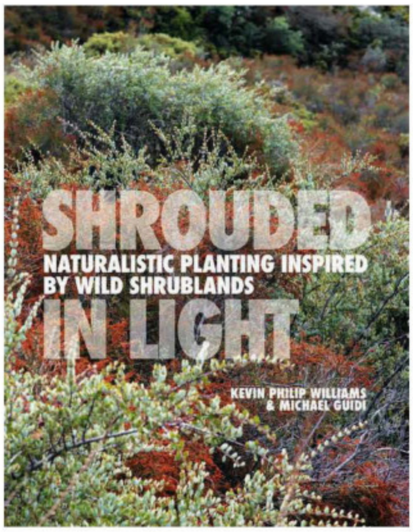


Clockwise from left The shrub *Artemisia californica* in its native California; the succulent tree *Aloidendron dichotomum* with an understorey of spurge and dormant shrubs in South Africa; heather dominates this heathland in Sweden.

THE REVIEW

Noel Kingsbury takes in a new book that looks at shrub communities around the world, and how we might begin to interpret them for garden and landscape use


SHROUDED
NATURALISTIC PLANTING INSPIRED BY WILD SHRUBLANDS
IN LIGHT
KEVIN PHILIP WILLIAMS & MICHAEL GUIDI

SHROUDED IN LIGHT: NATURALISTIC PLANTING INSPIRED BY SHRUBLANDS
by Kevin Philip Williams
and Michael Guidi
Filbert Press, £40,
ISBN 978-1739903954

Every now and again, maybe once in a decade, a genuinely revolutionary garden book comes along. This is one.

A lot of us are commenting on how we need to re-engage with woody plants. The New Perennial movement of the past 30 years has largely ignored them, and of the current crop of designers, only Nigel Dunnett really integrates them with perennials, and it is no coincidence that he has written the foreword for this book.

This book is not about individual shrubs (garden centre-type things, with big, plastic labels) but shrubs collectively. Shrublands. Shrubscapes. Shruburbs. Where everything is tangled and knotted up and totally intermingled.

Shrublands have a bad rep. Actually British ones – think hawthorn or blackthorn scrub – are about as dull as they get. Most around the world are far more diverse, but have been roundly disliked by all humanity – no economic value, and often physically impassable. Only guerrilla fighters and bandits have made them their home.

Our authors proclaim how diverse shrublands can be, not just in their floristic make-up but in the wildlife they support. They are big on describing them as mazes, as fractals, emphasising their ambiguity, their 'otherness' and the difficulty we have of reading them. They talk excitedly of 'dangerous gardening' and of the 'necroarchitecture of dead branches'. Later in the book they helpfully analyse them into terms of the spatial arrangement of plants and even use AI to generate virtual gardens using wildland shrub species. There is also a chapter of completed projects, which hints at the enormous range of possibilities that working with shrubscapes promises.

This is a book that is truly opulently illustrated, mostly with images from the American west, with Kyrgyzstan, Australia and Europe making occasional appearances. It includes quite a lot of art: paintings, tapestries, and the accidental abstracts of old doors, utility boxes and slabs of concrete. In fact, I know of no other gardening book that engages so extensively and so enthusiastically with the wider intellectual and cultural world. And a world of darker allusions too, of 'black

KEVIN PHILIP WILLIAMS AND MICHAEL GUIDI.

A mix of shrubs including *Acer pensylvanicum* growing beneath *Picea rubens* in the Allegheny Mountains of West Virginia.

> If Hunter S Thompson had got into gardening or ecology, this is what he might have written

metal’, hardcore punk and witchcraft. If the maverick ‘gonzo’ journalist Hunter S Thompson had got into gardening or ecology, this is what he might have written.

The text is extraordinarily eloquent, but occasionally goes off on flights of fantasy or philosophy that will leave many readers behind. This is a book for the hardcore, naturalistic gardener or wildscape person, but I do hope that landscape architects will pick it up; there is inspiration here for naturalistic versions of these dreary plantings that could actually ignite into locations for art, beauty and biodiversity.

Much is made of the mystery, the impenetrability, the unreachability and sheer black hole-ness of natural shrubscapes. I disagree, and quite honestly find this approach verging on the obscure. Last year I took a walk through a wonderful Portuguese *matos* landscape and suddenly realised that all the shrubs I was looking at could fall into categories defined by shape, each one giving the plant its own distinctive crack at competing for light, and allowing for the intermeshing and coexistence of many species. It actually made sense to me. I was disappointed there was no schema of shrub shape, and little on how shrubs can integrate with other growth forms. Perhaps I am unfair; maybe we need this flight of rhetoric, this clarion call of a poetic rant before we all calm down and let the technicians get down to seeing how we can make it all actually work.

Reviewer Noel Kingsbury is a writer, researcher and educator.

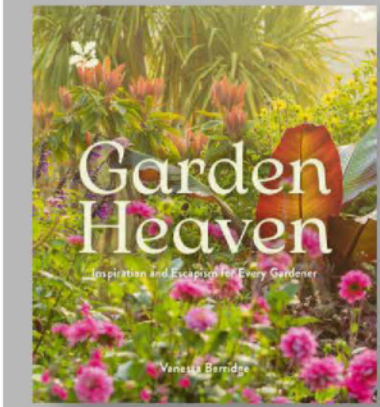
Recommended reads this month

The Garden Against Time
IN SEARCH OF A COMMON PARADISE
OLIVIA LAING

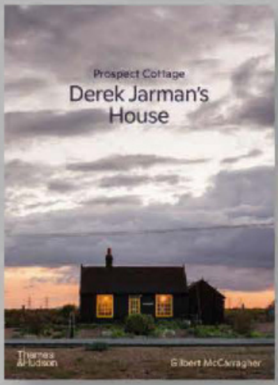
THE GARDEN AGAINST TIME: IN SEARCH OF A COMMON PARADISE
by Olivia Laing
Picador, £20,
ISBN 978-1529066678
Mid-pandemic, writer Olivia Laing and her husband moved into the former home in Suffolk of Mark Rumary, director of landscaping for many years at Notcutts. His cobwebbed apron still hung on the potting shed door, and the overgrown garden was packed with unusual delights. As Olivia sets about restoring it, she considers the idea of paradise and gardens, both real and imagined.

PAUL BANGAY
A LIFE IN GARDEN DESIGN

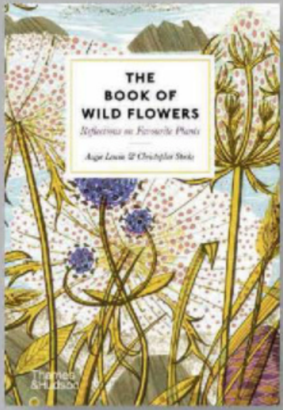
PAUL BANGAY: A LIFE IN GARDEN DESIGN
by Paul Bangay
Thames & Hudson, £45,
ISBN 978-1760763282
Top Australian garden designer Paul Bangay reflects on a career that has spanned nearly 40 years. He reveals the people and influences that have shaped his work around the world, including his own gardens, Stonefields in Melbourne and Garth Cottage in the Cotswolds.



GARDEN HEAVEN: INSPIRATION AND ESCAPISM FOR EVERY GARDENER
by Vanessa Berridge
National Trust Books, £14.99,
ISBN 978-0008641382
A sumptuous tour of 30 of Britain’s most beautiful gardens, from classic destinations such as Sissinghurst and Hidcote to more contemporary spaces such as Wildside, telling the stories of the gardens and the people who created them.



PROSPECT COTTAGE: DEREK JARMAN’S HOUSE
by Gilbert McCarragher, foreword by Frances Borzello
Thames & Hudson, £25,
ISBN 978-0500027233
Thirty years after the publication of *Derek Jarman’s Garden* comes *Derek Jarman’s House*. While the book focuses on the interiors of Jarman’s coastal retreat (saved for the nation in 2022), there are nods to the garden throughout – a trug of gardening gloves, gardening tools and dried flowers. Plus there are shots of the Garden Room, added by Jarman before his death, and new perspectives on the garden.


THE BOOK OF WILD FLOWERS
Reflections on Favourite Plants
Angie Lewin & Christopher Stocks
Thames & Hudson

THE BOOK OF WILDLFLOWERS: REFLECTIONS ON FAVOURITE PLANTS
by Angie Lewin and Christopher Stocks
Thames & Hudson, £16.99,
ISBN 978-0500027066
Explores the history and science of the nation’s wildflowers, with guidance on where to find them and how to cultivate them. It is beautifully illustrated with lithographs, linocuts, screenprints, watercolours and wood engravings.

‘I’ve still not cracked the common pitfall of sowing too much’

Gardener, writer and TV presenter **Rachel de Thame** talks about her new book and the books on her shelves, how to attract wildlife to our gardens, and how her gardening style has evolved

Tell us about *A Flower Garden for Pollinators* and why you wrote it My priorities as a gardener have evolved over time, and I hope with this new book to encourage others to explore another perspective and recalibrate what feels most important about our gardens. I believe having a beautiful garden can go hand in hand with creating a space that delivers equally for the pollinators and other beneficial insects so vital to a healthy and vibrant ecosystem.

What did you learn from writing it? For this book, I became completely absorbed in the entomological aspects of the subject, poring over academic papers reporting the results of trials examining insect numbers. Learning exactly where, how and when they find forage was compelling and enlightening.

If there’s one piece of advice you’d like to share from the book, what would it be? Ideally a couple of things: that we should adjust our perspective as gardeners, accepting that the creatures with which we share our gardens have needs that outweigh our own. Also, the importance of providing plants that not only produce forage in every season, but shelter and places to lay eggs. By adopting a holistic, year-round approach, one can really make a difference.

I’ll read anything about/by… So many writers. But Beth Chatto, Dr Oliver Rackham, Sue Stuart-Smith and Sarah Raven spring to mind because you really hear their unique voices. I also love an opinionated seed or nursery catalogue, such as Bob Brown’s for Cotswold Garden Flowers.

The books I’m currently reading I’m wallowing in Jekka McVicar’s wealth of herby knowledge in her latest offering, *100 Herbs to Grow*, and enjoying the new title by Polly Nicholson, *The Tulip Garden*. And I recently bought a copy of *The Floricultural Cabinet* (published in 1837) at an auction. It’s filled with fascinating and strangely unchanged gardening advice, and the colours overlaying the engravings remain as richly saturated as the day they were painted.

What sparked your interest in gardening? My father was, and my mother still is, potty about plants. Visiting gardens, nurseries and garden centres together and simply being in the garden while my father planted and pruned was the basis of my rather nerdy but happy childhood and laid the foundation for my own horticultural obsessions.

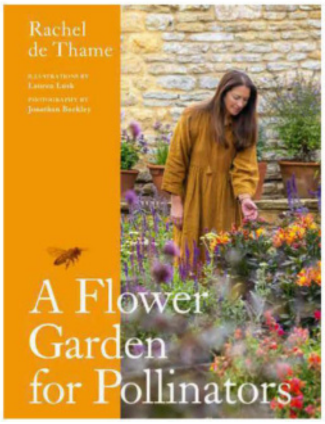
What is your current garden like? I’m grappling with the largest plot I’ve had in a lifelong series of gardens, so it’s still very much a work in progress. My priority remains trying things out, so my planting choices may strike some as lacking cohesion. But the self-contained walled garden is restored and productive, the borrowed view over the Cotswold fields ever-changing and snowdrops carpet the ground each winter.

Can you share your biggest gardening mistake or failure? I’ve still not cracked the common pitfall of sowing too much in one go and producing more than we can eat. I love growing courgettes and aim to pick them small. But work commitments invariably take me away for several days at the wrong moment and I return to find they’ve swelled to the size of a mammoth marrow.

What’s your guilty gardening secret? I’m always chasing my tail. Seed and bulb orders go in late and so sowing and planting is often delayed. My record for tardy tulip planting is February. I had to discard a few, but most flowered surprisingly well.

What’s your favourite garden or landscape to visit? I’m so fortunate in having opportunities to visit a wide range of gardens across the country. Each one offers fresh inspiration and pleasure on many levels. While a rose garden may make me swoon, I’m often happiest walking through a local bluebell wood or stopping to admire the froth of cow parsley in the verges.

What else are you up to at the moment? Filming for BBC *Gardeners’ World* and the RHS shows, and it looks set to be a busy year travelling to literary festivals. I’m planning to hold a series of talks and workshops from my corner of the Cotswolds, where I thought I’d also try offering cut flowers, grown in the walled garden. Flower farming has always interested me, and this will be a small-scale artisanal attempt to dip my toe in the water.



A FLOWER GARDEN FOR POLLINATORS
by Rachel de Thame
Greenfinch, £25,
ISBN 978-1529422146

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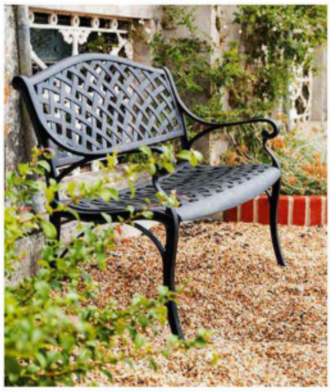

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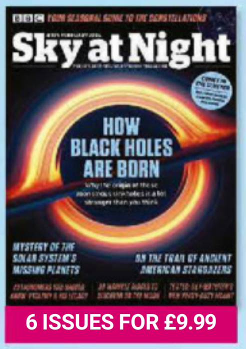
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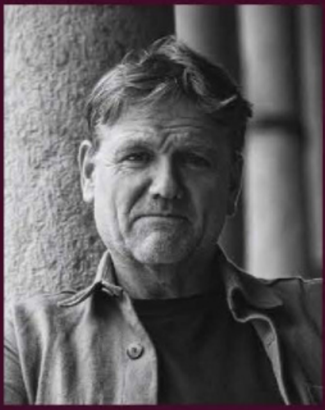
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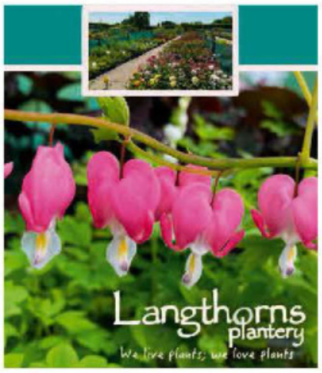

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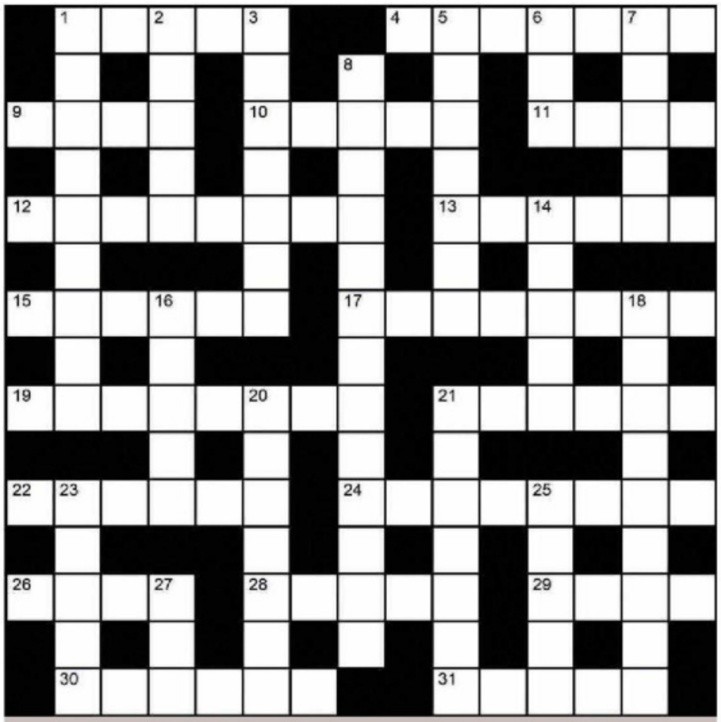

ACROSS
1 A dwarf, pink, white-throated *Gladiolus* – enchantment! (5)
4 Species term meaning scented, as in *Viola* _____ (7)
9 Determination: it can improve drainage in a scree garden! (4)
10 Approximate … texture of elm leaf's hairy surface (5)
11 Levy associated with a … biological term for plant groups (4)
12 Oxford Botanic Garden's arboretum – revealed by Hidcote's first curator, oddly (8)
13 Bee, for example, found in plantain section (6)
15 Dill developed in Wisley's extremes – in an uncontrolled manner (6)
17 Genus of coral plant, Lisa sure to move (8)
19 Foliage damage caused eg by sap-sucking insects – full acre destroyed (8)
21 Deadly nightshade genus … breaks apart – nothing inside (6)
22 Spring flowers also called flags (6)
24 An *Actaea* with brownish/purple foliage and white flowers – not blonde or ginger (8)
26 See 23 down
28 Something worth having, a bit of grass etc (5)
29 Colour of eg *Salix caprea* catkins (4)
30 Eg swathes of daffodils (6)
31 Moulds … left by earthworms (5)

DOWN
1 Can admire unusual … genus of bittercress and cuckoo flower (9)
2 Pelargonium with white flowers splotched red/bronze – native of Mexico once (5)
3 Crimson, semi-double *Camellia japonica* … 'Quicksilver'? (7)
5 Showy, tuberous perennials, usually lifted and stored in autumn (7)
6 Decay found in *Proteas* (3)
7 Harmful as eg aconite (5)
8 Buddleja's common name (9,4)
14 An asparagus stem (5)
16 Popular short name for plants of the *Narcissus* genus (5)
18 Genus of busy lizzies (9)
20 One of several common names for autumn crocus – 'Parvenu'? (7)
21 Such a plant thrives best in water (7)
23/26 Peach-coloured shrub rose, named after a famous children's author (5,4)
25 Trims eg a lawn's perimeter (5)
27 Flower garland from part of buddleja (3)

- **Solutions to this issue's crossword will be printed in the June issue**

SOLUTIONS TO APRIL CROSSWORD

ACROSS 1 Crocus **5** Echinops **9** Cyme **10** Apple **11** Trug **12** Oleander **13** Gorse **14** Hebe **15** Chokeberry **17** Snapdragon **20** Lawn **21** Morus **22** Lent Lily **24** Soil **25** Pot on **26** Peas **27** Nicandra **28** Sedges.

DOWN 2 Royal fern **3** Crenate **4** Sward **5** Esparto **6** Hoe **7** Nut tree **8** Plume **13** Green **15** Corms **16** Rowallane **18** Perilla **19** Galatea **20** Lily pad **21** Maori **23** Nanus **25** Pod.

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Ilex Nellie R Stevens

Ligustrum japonicum (pleached)

Magnolia grandiflora

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Photinia Red Robin

Privacy in gardens can be created using trees to hide or screen out an undesirable view. Trees grown for this purpose often have a clear stem up to fence panel height around 1.8-2m with a full bushy canopy above, forming a good screen above the fence line. This type of screening is particularly useful if the garden is overlooked by neighbouring properties or to retain lower-level exposure to an attractive wall or area.

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JUNE

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- Marian Boswall's design for a gravel garden and meadow around a charming old chapel in the Cotswolds
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ARE ‘WILDLIFE GARDENS’ PASSÉ?

Jo McKerr wonders if conventional ideas of wildlife-friendly gardens are old hat and it’s now time to put nature at the forefront of our thinking on gardening

ILLUSTRATION ROSANNA MORRIS

Creating gardens with wildlife in mind has been accepted garden practice for the past 50 years. But a new school of thought coming out of environmental activism suggests that our traditional approach to making spaces that are wildlife-friendly has been clouded by human bias that still puts human needs first, and leaves nature as a tokenistic afterthought.

Notions about ‘nature-first’ gardening and ecocentric or interspecies design have begun to come to the fore, describing an attitude towards gardens that seeks to put Nature in the driving seat. If we put the needs of the more-than-human species that live in our gardens on a par with our own needs, what will our gardens look like? Can we even garden anymore?

Style and taste have dominated garden design for much of the past century. The biggest shift that ecocentric and biocentric design asks the gardener to make is to put a philosophy at the centre of their ideas and practice in the garden. This doesn’t mean to say that nature-first gardens don’t have beauty, but they don’t have a commonality of look.

Emphasising the protection and importance of living things and naturally occurring things and de-emphasising human needs may seem a lot like wildlife gardening, until it dawns that there are an estimated one billion forms of life, and 10,000 different species of organism living in a teaspoon of your topsoil, and there isn’t a handy gardening book explaining ‘how to’ and which monthly jobs you should be doing to look after their needs.

Rather than be overwhelmed by the amount of ecological knowledge we don’t yet possess, or the crippling responsibility of being accountable for so much ‘life’, proponents of this approach to garden-making flip the vast unknown on its head, and convert it into a huge possibility to experiment, learn and grow differently.

In much the same manner as a ‘rewilding’ approach to conservation, an ecologically positive garden aims to be process-led rather than goals-orientated. Instead of expecting to know what needs those who use your garden have, a garden is an opportunity to discover and collaborate with who and what lives around you.

If we put the needs of the species in our gardens on a par with our own, can we even garden anymore?

Reframing our relationship with plants is key for American designer Ben Vogt, who creates gardens where lawns are replaced with prairie plantings, and where plants are much more than seasonal colour. They are communities that co-exist in a dynamic landscape that provides food and habitat for local invertebrates and others that depend on them. Many of these indigenous prairie plants are better adapted to the conditions of the regional environment, so require fewer resources to grow.

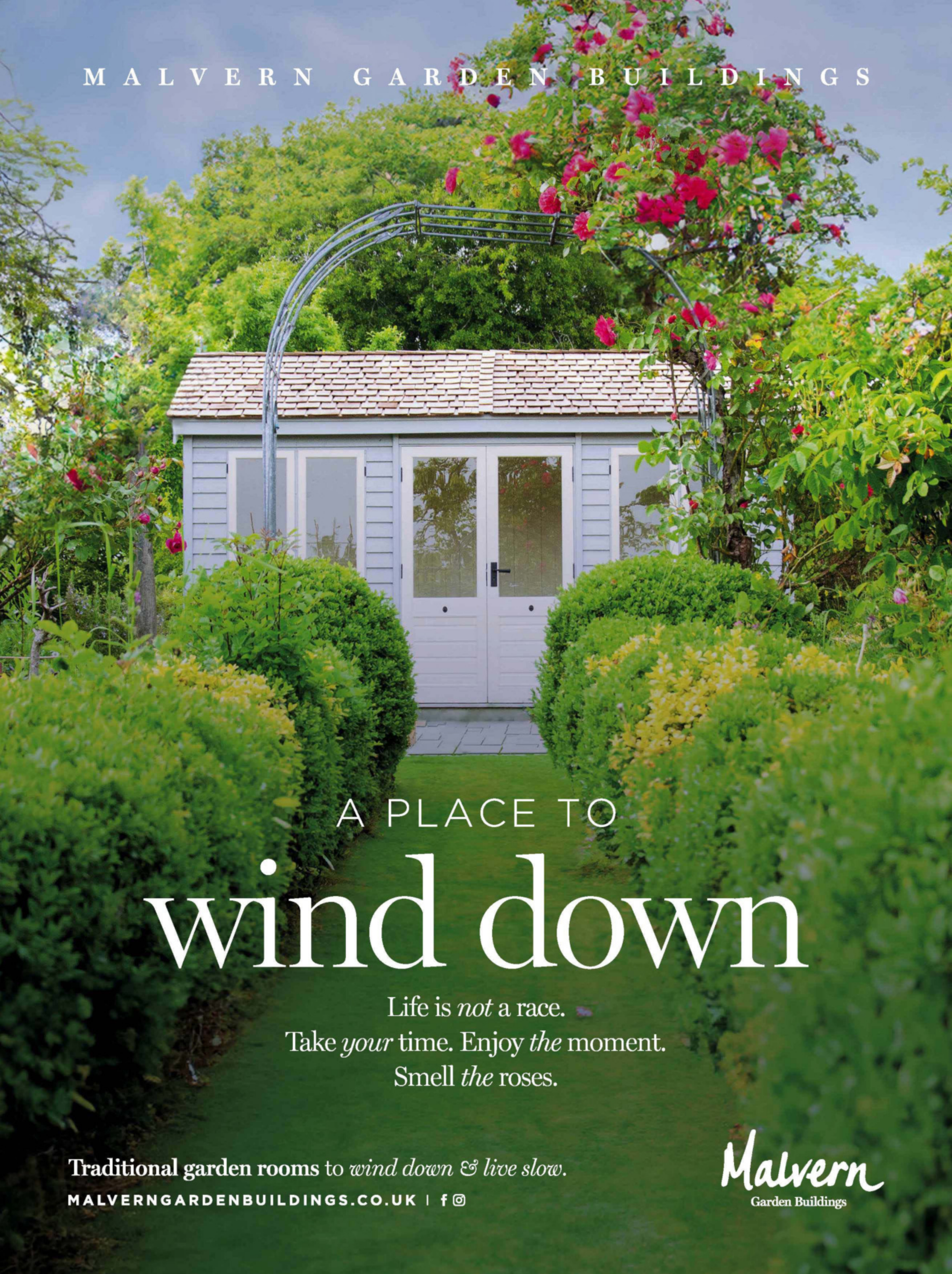
The density and diversity of this type of planting means that ‘weeds’ have less room to grow and establish and that ‘pests’ are welcomed as part of a cycle of life that will find its own balance. The biomass of the planting is so dense that some losses in the plants are not noticed among the leafy abundance. Pests and diseases have evolved for a monoculture system, so plant variety and health means that they are unable to dominate.

From a European perspective, the ability of plants to colonise, naturalise and co-exist within a site drives the design concept for those such as French landscape architect Gilles Clément, who is inspired by the plant communities of wastelands. These communities, he believes, can teach us a lot about the resilience and regenerative properties of plants as we garden in a changing climate.

Considering soil as a living system that supports all life above ground, and recognising plants as autonomous, means that gardening these spaces radically shifts from a maintenance chore to an elevated complex stewardship that mixes soil science with ecology and botany. Much of the management of these new spaces combines traditional ecological knowledge from indigenous peoples with the latest thinking about soil ecologies and pollinators to create a heady mix.

In many ways, it is the steep learning curve that those who garden these nature-centric gardens need to go on that is the biggest obstacle to their progress. Gardening is still seen as a low-paid, low-skill job, and if we are to move forward, we need to recognise gardeners as the crucial keystone species on which these gardens now depend. ☐

• Jo McKerr is a landscape consultant and garden writer who runs workshops on creating ecological gardens. **jomckerr.com**



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